THE SIX CUSHIONS.

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

'THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE.'

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CHAPTER I.

THE RECTOR'S FREAK.

'SIX CUSHIONS, each four feet long. Here are canvas, wools, and lily pattern; but how they are all to be accomplished in time passes my conception! They ought to be finished by the time our six weeks' absence is over, or they never will be made up in time for the re-opening!'

So spoke the Rector's wife, with a look of dismay and perplexity upon her sensible good-natured face.

'Has no one asked for them?' inquired the Rector, looking up from his calculations.

'Every trustworthy worker is as busy as possible with other matters—for the Altar—lectern—chairs. We really shall have to use the old ones on the great day, unless they can tell me at the Berlin shop of someone who can be trusted—and that I don't half like.'

'Let me have them for the elders of my Friday evening damsels.'

'Those girls!'

'Do you suppose they cannot work well enough? I thought it was supposed to be no very abstruse affair?'

'The work—yes! but now, in the very height of our season! If they were all like Clara, or had homes like her, it might answer; but for the rest—'

'That is, if they were all people to whom it would be no trial.'

'Are you content to have the trial made on your chancel cushions?'

'Yes, I am. The poor children are brimming over with good desires; and now that I am leaving them after these months of training, and probably never to return to precisely the same form of intercourse, it will be well to give some practical means of testing their perseverance. I own that I should like the work of the cushions to be the offering of my young communicants.'

'Well. Whom do you propose besides Clara?'

'The two Maclaines.'

'They seem to me to go out a great deal. Sometimes I meet one with Mr. Maclaine on the parade, and then the other with the children on the beach. I sometimes think I never turn a corner without meeting one of them; and as Lady Euphemia knows everybody, it will be worse than ever now that they are both out! I do not think they will have a chance, whatever they may wish.'

'At any rate, I know that Bride Maclaine will never undertake what she has not a fair chance of

carrying out. I shall trust to her to tell me whether they can do it.'

'Shall you ask Edith Thetford?'

'Assuredly not!'

'I thought not. Yet the fancy-work those young ladies get through is wonderful!'

'Yes, but I am not going to have my cushions chattered—gossiped—and, I am afraid, flirted over. Besides, Edith has only twice been at the class since the Confirmation, and can hardly be reckoned as still belonging to it. What do you think of Miss West?'

'Miss West!' with three notes of admiration at least in her voice. 'Poor child, she is a harmless little thing, but in that distracting whirl that she lives in, I don't see how it is possible. Nay, I doubt whether she so much as knows how to work. She will set her maid to do it, and think she has done very handsomely all that is required of her.'

'We shall see.'

'Perhaps, indeed, after her constant attendance at the classes, and all that her father has done for the church, you could not well avoid asking her; but if you stipulate against any vicarious performance, I don't think she will accept. Who next—? By-the-by, I think none of the regular school-room girls should be asked. At their age they are loaded with lessons, and it is important to their parents that the time should be made the most of; nor ought the short space they get for exercise to be encroached on.'

'I believe you are right. That excludes one of whom I had thought, and reduces me to Joanna Harding and Mary Rose.'

'They may do very well. Mrs. Harding will give Joan every facility, and I do not see why little Mary should not manage it. She must have much more time than your prime favourites. And if the work is not finished?'

'It will be a wholesome spectacle for the workers. Yes, you shake your head, but I am obstinate.'

'If you were to be at home, to keep them up to it.'

'The very thing I do not wish. I had rather have it as little as possible a matter of personal influence. There is too much of that already.'

With which words he left the room.

'If three are done in time,' sighed Mrs. Henderson, 'it is as much as I expect! He only sees the girls when they are devouring every word he says. I know better what they are made of, and above all what it will be to them when this place is at the fullest and gayest. To be sure, it makes little difference to Clara, or to little Mary Rose; but for the rest! Six cushions to be worked by six girls in six weeks! Well, Janet will come home with me, and between her and me, we will make up for the Rector's freak!'

Dr. Henderson's class of young ladies had been assembled in the winter to prepare for Confirmation, and afterwards had gladly continued to meet, in order to be assisted in becoming devout Com-

municants, and in acquiring the religious instruction, in which, from different causes, many had found themselves deficient.

It had been a large class in the early spring, but had ever since long been diminishing. One bright-eyed girl had been laid in the cemetery; several had ceased to attend after their Easter Communion; and as the days lengthened, family after family deserted their winter quarters, and every week there was some farewell, some expression of gratitude for the great advantage of the pains that the Rector had bestowed on the departing maiden who bade him good-bye.

Thus the number had dwindled to nine when they met on the last Friday in July, mostly with a sorrowful sense that this was the end of what had been much valued and enjoyed. Clara Braithwayte, the curate's daughter, who was always the authority for Rectory politics, had pronounced that it was very unlikely that Dr. Henderson would have time to read with them again, when the church was re-opened, after his return home. There were many people whose need was more pressing than theirs; and if he had any young ladies next winter, there would be sure to be a new young lot, who would have to 'begin at the beginning of everything,' said Clara, with the capablé business-like air wherewith she was wont to talk of matters ecclesiastical. Also, Clara had hinted at some remarkable proposal that was to be made at this last session; and as she refused to explain further, there was much

excitement in consequence, opinions varying as to whether it would regard choir singing, district visiting, or Sunday-school teaching.

'Or perhaps,' observed a small person, with a jay's wing upright in her hat, 'he wants us to put in a Maidens' painted window.'

'Painted by West?' laughed another of the group.

'What do you mean, Bride? Oh, I see; but we might all help a little.'

'Camilla West giving thirty pounds, and we thirty pence apiece?'

'I think I could do it in time,' quoth the aspiring jay, 'if I might only send about my white mouse pen-wipers by the post, and make people buy them at eighteen-pence apiece.'

'True, Alice,' said the lowest and meekest of voices; 'the very humblest may aid in the work.'

'There's the bell changing!' and therewith the party entered the school-room, which was serving as a temporary chapel.

After the service, the nine proceeded to the Rectory, where they were ushered into the study, and were presently joined by Dr. Henderson. The tone of the day's lesson was altogether that of a farewell; and when the reading and comments were over, the Doctor said a few kind words of the enjoyment he had had in going over these things with such earnest and attentive pupils. Whether they could resume these readings on his own return must, he feared, be left doubtful;

but he believed that most of them were able to study for themselves, and in case of any difficulty, or desire of advice, he was always at their service.

Tears were in the eyes of several, and there were half-choked endeavours at fervent thanks, and half-uttered resolutions; but the Rector, feeling a good deal himself, and not at all anxious for a scene, hastily proceeded, 'There, there, I know it all, and you know it all, my dears. We have liked our readings, and now we have to show how deep the seed is gone. That is the moral of the thing. And now I have something to tell you.'

The nine hats quivered with agitation.

'I believe,' said the Rector, 'that most of you would like to make some sort of offering of your own to this church of ours, and I see an opening for some of you. The six cushions for the step before the altar-rail remain to be worked, and I have got leave from the managers to put them into the hands of six of you.'

Clara smiled, and looked already informed and superior. Everyone else bent forward eagerly.

'Now listen to the conditions,' continued Dr. Henderson. 'You must remember that this may be called work for the sanctuary, and that it would not be reverent towards its purpose to make it mere idle employment for your hands while visiting or amusement is going forward, so as to have it discussed by way of gossip. Moreover, the work should be entirely your own; and done in time that belongs to yourselves, and not to your parents

or your studies; and it must be finished in the six weeks of our absence, or there may not be time to make them up. Even I—little as I know of such affairs—can see that more or less of self-denial and perseverance will be needful in each case; but I am inclined to think,' and he gave the smile that especially gained the hearts of his girls, 'that there lies the very salt of the matter.'

There was a pleased silence, not without emotion. The jay's wing was the first in action. 'If you please, Dr. Henderson, I could do one if Mademoiselle would let me off my practising.'

There was a little suppressed murmur of diversion at the audacious promptness so characteristic of the jay's owner, and at her want of heed of the Rector's speech. He joined the laugh, as he said good-humouredly,

'Thank you, Alice; but I am afraid that is exactly what I did not intend. You—and you two, my dears,' he said to the other juniors, 'are the property of your several Mademoiselles just now, and must be content to wait till lessons cease to be a duty.'

'I know we should have no time,' gently observed one of the rejected to the other; but the ambitious Alice was not silenced yet, and was beginning—

'But, Doctor Hen—' when an equally eager exclamation bore her down.

'You did not mean me! Oh, surely not! I am out of the school-room now, and I'll make everything give way to it.'

'We had thought of you, thank you, Joanna,' he said, in a voice calculated to calm and repress both the girls. 'We thought you would still have a good deal of quiet time, even when your mother's comfort was attended to.'

'Oh! Mamma will be so pleased. She will like me to do it better than anything. She is always wishing me to work.'

'Alice's black beady eyes sparkled again with a faint hope; 'Mamma and Mademoiselle want me to work—'

But Alice's tongue was so ready that no one ever quite knew whether she were talking or not; and Bride Maclaine, a tall large-boned maiden, with very Scottish hair and complexion, but holding her head with a vigorous dignity that made her look both handsome and distinguished, said, 'Fenella and I should be delighted; but should we have to find the materials?'

'Right, my dear; I ought to have made it clear that the whole stock of materials has been provided —out of Mr. West's last bounteous help towards our interior,' he added, turning to a slight fair-haired girl, who blushed—under her Parisian hat—up to the ears, which were weightily hung with golden fetters, and timidly answered, 'If you would allow me to try, Dr. Henderson, you cannot guess how happy I should be.'

'I knew you would, my dear,' he kindly answered.

'Thank you; I hope I shall do it well,' she whispered, with a dew of fervour in her eyes.

'May we each have one, then, Sir?' proceeded Bride Maclaine.

'If you think you have time. If that is not certain, as I know you have many occupations, perhaps you had better take one between you.'

'Oh, then—' chirped Alice once more.

'Thank you,' said Bride, unheeding her. 'We will make time.'

'Bride will manage it for us,' said Fenella, a smaller edition of her sister, not so striking, though much nearer being pretty.

'Clara, you for certain—' still persisted the undaunted jay-wearer to her next neighbour; 'but that's only five. Couldn't you say a word for me?'

Clara only signed silence; and Alice's looks fell as Dr. Henderson turned towards the only remaining lady, a little figure in a dove-coloured dress, plain grey hat, and demure, meek, pensive face. 'And you, Mary, would you like the undertaking?'

'Thank you, Dr. Henderson,' in the lowest of voices, 'I will do my best.'

'Then thank you, in Mrs. Henderson's name and my own. And I am further commissioned to say that if all you young ladies will honour her tea-kettle—no, drum-major—what is the fashionable slang for drinking tea in the middle of the day?—eh! kettle-drum, is it?—to-morrow, she will give you the patterns and materials. Will that suit you?'

'Oh, thank you, Dr. Henderson.'

'We shall be so glad.'

'It will be another sight, not real good-bye.'

'Perhaps Mrs. Henderson will be so kind as to excuse it, if we cannot both come; I am not sure that there is not some scheme for to-morrow.'

This was from Bride Maclaine; and the last of the indefatigable Alice Coxe was, 'And, oh! please mayn't I come, just in case anybody should cut her finger, or—anything—you know!'

CHAPTER II.

THE TURTLE-NEST.

THE Turtle-nest was a little lodging-house, of the villa style of architecture, with a great deal of clematis over the verandah, and a view that would have been over the bay had not a tall house erected an envious shoulder between. In compensation, the little oriel on the other side of the drawing-room looked down the whole length of the principal drive, and for a small person, when the wind was not high, was an excellent post of observation.

The room was draped with fawn-colour, enlivened with pink fast assuming a tint such that it was hard to tell which was the pink and which the fawn. A photograph of a clergyman stood on a sloping frame on the table, a lesser one was on the chimney-piece,

a larger over the chiffoniere; and a pale lady in black silk, with a net cap one remove from the widow's, sat on the sofa at right angles to the oriel, with a book, and a basket of plain-work by her side, and a writing-case on the table before her; also a miniature-case lay open, with a coloured photograph of the same clergyman.

The book was on her knee, but she seldom turned a page. Her eyes were generally directed towards the oriel, through which she presently beheld a low pony-carriage turning in at the gate that led to the Rectory approach.

'Mrs. Harding,' she murmured to herself, 'going to pick up her daughter after her evening drive. Ah! some people can have luxuries, but we never sigh after them.'

Then an open carriage, with a pair of stylish greys, bright with silvered harness, and with two smart servants, dashed up the road and whirled in.

'Ah! the West carriage! Poor child, what a comment on the pomps and vanities she has renounced! Is it empty? Then it has come for her alone! There is Mr. Braithwayte walking by—where is he going so fast? Dear Alfred never allowed himself to be hurried beyond the dignity of his position! Can he be so perturbed at having found out that matron at last? *I* never trusted her, though I hope I know my present position too well to speak. The Doctor is keeping them a long time—a farewell address, I suppose. Will he give *my* dear child credit for her constant attendance,

and meek fulfilment of all his counsels? Ah! humility is always overlooked. Do I see them coming out? Yes, there Miss West whirls away; there is Joan Harding by her mother's side; the little pert Alice—yes, and the two Maclaines. I wonder they let those two girls walk so far alone. But where is the simple figure of my own dear child? Has Dr. Henderson detained her to give her some testimonial of his satisfaction? Ah! there is a carriage stopping here.'

And the lady sank into her reading attitude.

Enter the fashionable Camilla West, ushered by the simple-dressed Mary Rose; Camilla bearing an exquisite bouquet of roses and geraniums.

'Good morning, my dear Miss West. How very kind of you to save my poor child the walk! It is not far, but she feels the heat so much, and in our position—'

'Would you like these flowers?'

'Ah! my dear Miss West, you cannot think what delight the beauties of nature give us. Ah! these so recall our pretty garden! A thousand thanks for your recollection of such recluses as ourselves. I know you are the happier for it.'

'Thank you,' said Camilla, rather confusedly; 'and what is very pleasant, Dr. Henderson has just asked us to work the cushions for the chancel step.'

'*Indeed!*—You too, my child?'

'Yes, me too, Mamma.'

'Well, I am sure it will be an exceeding satis-

faction to contribute any humble offering; above all, for those who have only their labour of love to offer.—And you, my dear Miss West, do I understand that you too are a volunteer in the work of the sanctuary?'

'I hope to try.'

'How? I know it would be so delightful to you to snatch an interval from your many avocations. I hope you may be able to contrive it. And if at any time you should wish to retire with your work to a more congenial atmosphere, and share the task of love with my little recluse here, we should so gladly welcome you.'

'Thank you,' said Camilla again; 'perhaps—if I can—'

'Ah, yes. I know your time is much taken up, in a way that I can appreciate, though my present position is so different! But no doubt every minute you can steal from the round of gaieties is no small treasure! And for such a purpose! And who are your fellow-workers, my dear?—Clara Braithwayte, of course—'

'The Maclaines, and Joan Harding.'

'Indeed! quite the *élite* of the place—at least omitting my little Mary from that category. Well, it is very gratifying; no doubt it will be great enjoyment to bring your works completed.'

'I hope so.' And Camilla took her leave.

'Well, my little Mary,' said her mother, kissing her, 'so you are one of Dr. Henderson's selected few. You owe it in part to the memory of your

dearest father, my child; and therefore I love you the better for it.'

'I was the only one who did not offer, Mamma; he asked me of himself.'

'Quite right, darling; it is always the most unassuming to whom the truest honour is given.'

'I did not like to put myself forward, when they were so many; and then, Mamma, there will be a great deal of work! But I am glad not to be left out.'

'Left out? No, my love, you are not one to be left out. Humility never is left out in the long run, and in your position it would be singular neglect in Dr. Henderson to leave you out! I have been accustomed to slights for myself, but not for you, darling.'

'He would not let Alice Coxe take one, though she was very eager, and begged hard, because he said she could have no proper time.'

'Just as I told you, dear. Her forwardness never prepossesses people. But what is the work?'

'We are each to work a flat cushion—the top and two sides, I believe—for the chancel-step; to be knelt on, you know, Mamma. We are all to go to tea at the Rectory at five o'clock, and have the work given out to us.'

'But, my dear, Dr. Henderson can never expect us to find the materials. I should be most happy; but in our position he ought not to require it.'

'No, Mamma; I said nothing about it, but Miss Maclaine asked.'

'Ah—so Scotchy, I could have guessed it; though I am sure she was not one to be so solicitous. Then materials are to be provided?'

'Yes; Mrs. Henderson will give them to us to-morrow. It is a great deal of work, Mamma, and I could not think how people who go out so much as the Maclaines and Miss West could undertake it. They must sacrifice much more than they seem disposed to do if they wish to succeed.'

'Do not fear, my child; you will not be left behind by all these, with so many more advantages. The quiet humble one always bears off the palm. You need not be discouraged.'

'No, Mamma dear; though Joan Harding is so very eager, and talks so much, that I am sure she will tire herself out long before the work is done.'

'It will be an interesting study,' said Mrs. Rose, in a meditative tone. 'Here are Wealth, Gaiety, Fervour, and meek Lowliness, all set to compete in one race. We shall see who bears off the guerdon!'

Mrs. Rose lapsed into meditation, with one eye on the window; Mary leant back with a book in her hand: Miss West's flowers remained on the table till the maid came in and took pity on them.

CHAPTER III.

FALCONBERG.

FALCONBERG stood high on one of the cliffs that closed in the bay. The view was one of the most exquisite to be obtained in that world of exquisite views—unobstructed, and unobstructible, unless anyone should choose to erect a shot-tower beneath. There lay the blue summer sea, flecked here and there with the white waves that dashed and flashed round rocks—some beneath the surface, others erecting themselves in fantastic shapes. And the curved line of the bay trended around, low, and covered with white houses in the centre; but opposite, rising into high noble-looking cliffs that defied the waves—a delicious view for dreamy enjoyment, and turned to the best account by the arrangements of Falconberg, where stone balconies ran round the two chief stories of the house, supported on solid arches, and up-bearing stone vaults that protected the great plate-glass windows alike from summer glare and winter's storm. The balustrade was adorned with vases containing a profusion of scarlet geranium, verbena, and calceolaria, that sent pleasant odours through the open windows of the dining-room, where the luncheon-table was spread. A massive erection of silver and glass stood in the middle of the table, bearing a profusion of flowers in the centre, and of

condiments in its lesser branches. Jellies and salads of the most *recherché* order alternated with fruit and sweets; and silver corner-dishes full of cutlets were handed round by smart servants, far more in number than in the proportion needful for the three occupants of the table.

'Carriage wanted, Ma'am?'

'Well—yes—I hardly know.—Camilla, my dear, what say you to a drive?' asked Mrs. West, a small spare light-complexioned woman, in the richest of all blue and black brocades.

'If you please, Mamma. Only if you would kindly set me down at the Rectory at five—'

'The Rectory again, my dear! I thought you had taken leave of your lessons there.'

'We are to be there for an early tea, Mamma dear. There is some work that we have promised to do for Mrs. Henderson, and we are to meet and have the patterns given to us.'

'Work! you, my dear? What kind of work?'

'Very pretty work indeed, Mamma. It is the Berlin embroidery for the cushions for the chancel-step,' said Camilla in a somewhat deprecating tone.

'Indeed! Well, I should have thought, after all your dear papa has done for the church, Mrs. *H*enderson (Mrs. West was so anxious about her *hs* that her aspirate was almost a guttural,) need not have required you to work like a slave.'

'Oh no, Mamma, I like it! We all are so much pleased.'

'Who, my dear? who are the we?'

'Fenella, Mamma, and her sister, and Miss Harding—and the rest. I was to meet them this evening.'

'Oh! Mr. West!' And the bald-headed father of the family raised his keen light-grey eyes from the freshly-arrived Times in his hand. 'Papa, do you hear? The Doctor has been asking these young ladies to work the cushions, or something, for the church. I am sure, much as you have done already, you or I would willingly contribute to having them done in the first style at the best ecclesiastical warehouse in London, in Camilla's name too, if she pleased.'

'Oh no, Mamma,' said Camilla emphatically, becoming crimson as she spoke with a distressed, almost breathless eagerness.

Her father glanced at her, and she looked reassured, as she added, 'It would be the greatest disappointment.'

'Eh! what, it is a little party among yourselves,' said Mrs. West, 'for the pleasure of it?'

'We wish greatly to do it ourselves,' said Camilla softly. 'It is all we can do.'

'All that some of you can do, perhaps! and one would not deprive the others; but you—you who have had a fifty given in your own name, besides I can't tell how much pocket-money—why, you cannot be satisfied without wasting your time and your eye-sight.'

'It is not the same,' whispered Camilla, still looking at her father.

'No,' said Mr. West. 'The child had rather do more than play at having her name set down. She is right there—and a bit of work in earnest will do her no harm, play-work though it is.'

'Well, to be sure,' said Mrs. West, 'it sounds well—Miss *H*arding, and Lady Euphemia's daughters—and if she has no time, why then Cotes can finish it for her. I'll set you down, Camilla, and the barouche can come for you.'

Camilla made no protest, but sat quietly satisfied. Her father finished his paper and his glass of ale, and they rose; but as the two ladies were passing out of the dining-room, he laid his hand caressingly on his daughter and said—

'You wish to do this work, my dear? what is it?'

'To work one cushion for the chancel-step, Papa. It is all I can do myself! And they have been *so* good to ask me.'

'Well,' said the great railway contractor, who had little time for home, and only idolized his daughter, 'do as you please. I see you like it; and I know all the works I have shared in have seemed more my own when I have handled the spade myself.'

'Just so, Papa,' said Camilla brightly; 'and you and Mamma shall not be teazed about it! I shall have plenty of time!'

'Time! Why, you must have nothing but time.'

CHAPTER IV.

CAPE VERD.

'Oh dear! oh dear! was there ever such an intolerable bother?'

'What's the row, Joan?'

'There's the stream of visitors begun. I could not get Mamma to get ready in time; and now the morning callers have begun there will be no such thing as stirring out in time.'

'In time?'

'Oh! don't you know—for going to Mrs. Henderson's.'

'Very odd if I did not know! You have dinned nothing else into my head for the last thirty-six hours! Sound the trumpets, beat the drums.'

'Now Miles!'

'But what time is this tremendous kettle-drum to come off?'

'At five o'clock.'

'And it is not half-past two! Well, you are crying out before you are hurt.'

'Yes, but I know when they once begin they won't stop.'

'And what of that?'

'Don't you know, Miles, they will be sure to send for me, and then—oh dear! I shall never be able to

get away, and Walter Bellenden will come back, and there will be an end of me.'

'How sad!'

'Miles! It is very vexatious to live with people who never will sympathize with one!'

'Ah! my sweet little sister,' cried the tall brother, in a languishing voice, 'how piteous is your fate, to be detained by mundane frivolities from the interesting occupation of pricking holes in a bit of canvas with a long—'

'Now, Miles, I won't have you irreverent.'

A door opened from an inner room, and a gentleman put out his head. 'Joan, do I hear you chattering here? Don't you know that your mamma has a whole host of people to entertain in the drawing-room?'

'Yes, Papa, but I can't go in.'

'Can't?'

'No, for if I did I should be caught, and not able to go to Mrs. Henderson's in time.'

'And what of that?'

'The work, Papa.'

'I'll tell you what, Joanna, you have turned the house upside-down about that work ever since it was put into your head, and almost worried your mamma ill about it. If it is to be made an excuse for doing nothing to help her, I'll hear no more about it. I shall tell Mrs. Henderson you have other duties.'

'O Papa, Papa!'

Her father did not attend to her, but walked on,

leaving the door open as a hint that she should follow. 'O Miles! Miles!' was then her cry.

'Stuff!' said her brother, seeing her real distress; 'you know you would have saved all this if you would only have gone in time to keep Mamma from getting overwhelmed with all these old women.'

'I suppose I must,' said Joan disconsolately; 'but if they do stay till half-past four, dear Miles, do just make a row under the window, or anything to make an excuse, or get me out.'

'Very well—if you can escape the grey tyrant father! You'll have him shouting for you in a moment.'

Joan was obliged to obey, and entered the drawing-room, where her mother, a fragile delicate creature, sat on her sofa, in the midst of three elderly ladies and one young one. Her face seemed to strangers to betoken nothing but the sweetest and most kindly interest in their communications; but to her own family, the quiver of the dark eye-lashes, and the pink spots on the cheeks, were evidence that though there was some enjoyment, there was also a patient endurance of the clamour of tongues which would cost her something by-and-by. Captain Harding was effecting a diversion by talking to one of the ladies; and Joan knew that the best thing she could do would be to entice as many as possible into the conservatory and garden; but she had a particular aversion to her own contemporary of the party, Edith Thetford; and besides, whatever might prolong their stay was an

increase of the damage both to her mother and herself.

So she only entered on a languishing kind of conversation, thinking that she was keeping it quiet, in order that the third pair of tongues might not be a fresh element of torment to her mother; and the visitor was obliged to work up a little animation for herself.

'Is not your aunt, Lady Bellenden, coming here in a short time?'

'Yes—next week.'

'Which house has she taken?'

'Sans Souci.'

'Oh! that is nice! It is so near you. How glad you must be! She will take you out a great deal, I suppose.'

'I don't think so.'

'Oh! but you will find it so. How delightful! She is such a charming person for pic-nics, and croquet parties, and all that.'

'I have no time for pic-nics and croquet,' said Joan, with an important air.

'Indeed! Why, you are out?'

'Joan,' said Captain Harding, in a voice to her ears full of displeased warning and reproof, though perfectly polite and courteous towards the strangers, 'would not Miss Thetford like to see the opening we have made towards the water?'

Captain Harding's house and land were his own; he was particularly fond of laying out gardens, and had managed to make his beautiful little Cape Verd

worthy of its name, with the wonders of exotic vegetation that grew in its warmer nooks; its fearless orange trees, and bushy myrtles. The only fear was that it would get so perfect at last that he would find no more to do to it, would grow tired of it, sell it, and go off to create another paradise. However, as no other air in England, or out of it, afforded Mrs. Harding so much comparative ease, there was the less danger.

Joan was rather in difficulties. His look had reminded her that one stipulation had been that the cushions were not to be made matter of chatter and discussion, and it was therefore the less easy to answer Miss Thetford's much astonished demand why she should doubt about having time for the gaieties her aunt was likely to bring in her train—inquiries that no attempt to do the honours of the straight quarter-deck terrace, the lovely view into the blue bay, nor of the rose garden, could avert.

Why should she not have time now she was out?

Joan observed that she had only been released from the school-room, and a nursery governess taken for her two little sisters, instead of her own grand finishing one, in order that she might be free to be with her mother, read to her, write her notes, drive out with her, and save her trouble generally. It was perfectly true; but the truthful Joan was not at ease while she explained, for she knew it was not the real reason of what she had just announced. Nor did it satisfy Miss Thetford, who began at once to console her, and assure her that when Mrs. Harding

was pretty well, as she always was in the summer, of course she would not think of keeping her at home, and preventing her from enjoying herself. It even sounded as if Miss Thetford fancied that Joan was afraid of her as a selfish exacting invalid, for she declared that Lady Bellenden would be sure to talk to her, and show her that it would not do.

'Oh!' cried Joan, in horror and indignation, 'it is not that—it is no such thing as that. Mamma would let me go anywhere—do anything. She would never stand in the way!'

'What—and will not your papa let you? I call that a shame!'

'No such thing!' cried the hotly indignant Joan, 'they would both only like it for me; it is only that I don't care. I have got some work that I have undertaken,' she added, in a tone of some mystery and importance.

'Indeed, what can it be? It is such a pity. Can't we help you in it? we are such quick workers,' said Edith Thetford; who, troublesome as she was, was good nature personified.

'Oh no, no,' said Joan, with dignity, 'not for the world. I could not let anyone help me.'

'What is it?'

Joan hesitated, feeling as if to mention it would be against the injunction.

'Oh, I know! It is for the church, is it not? We met Mrs. West just now, saying—as proud as could be, that Camilla was engaged to meet all the *élite* of her young friends, to undertake some fancy

decoration for the church; it seemed to be considered the appropriate thing for young ladies. Are you one of the *élite*, Joan?'

'Nasty woman!' exclaimed the exacerbated Joanna; certainly little proving her right to be one of the *élite*.

'Well, I don't see any harm in her! I think she is very good fun. But do tell me, surely Dr. Henderson cannot have given you so much work as to hinder your enjoying yourself. He could not have meant that; and Carry and I would come and help you any day.'

'No, I thank you,' exclaimed Joan. 'He said it was to be a work of self-denial, or it would lose its very essence. And I value it too much to depute it to other hands. Indeed, I have promised not—not even Mamma must help me.'

'Oh, very well. Only remember if you get tired of it, you have a friend in need who will forgive and forget.'

Before Joanna had digested this kind offer, came the welcome signal to return to the house, as the guests were departing. It was but three o'clock. The round visage of the clock seemed to grin derision, and its little warning note to chuckle at her, as Miles might have done, for the needless frenzy she had been in; but the fret was still upon her spirits, and she eagerly exclaimed, 'Now, Mamma, let us get out before the enemy return to the charge, or Walter comes back from seeing that tiresome house.'

Mrs. Harding felt a strong inclination to have a

little quiet rest before her drive in the pony-carriage; but, in the first place, she always gratified Joan whenever it was possible to her; in the second, peace would have been unattainable with Joan in one of her agonies; and in the third, nothing distressed her so much as for Papa to come in and be displeased with Joan for worrying her. So she smiled sweetly, and consented that Joan should send her maid down with her hat; and when the maid, almost a confidential nurse, remonstrated upon her flushed tired looks, she smiled again, and said the fresh air would do her good; and she took care that nothing of languor should strike her husband's eye as she crossed the hall and took her seat in the pony-carriage, where Joan was charioteer, and after taking her out for a couple of hours, was to set herself down at the Rectory.

Joan had subsided now. Her fears were over, so that she could be happy again; and a very happy pair they looked, the mother scarcely appearing older than the daughter, so delicately cut and tinted was her face, and so long and shady her dark eye-lashes. Joan was a taller larger person, with more marked features, and a rich bloom, such as her mother never could have had, as well as an air of vigour, health, and animation, which made her pleasant to look upon, though she could hardly ever possess the same lovely gentleness of expression. It was pleasant to hear her talk in her great and enthusiastic happiness.

'Mamma, I am sorry if I fidgeted you; but I

was so afraid anything should happen to stop me; and I think it ought to be a very high duty indeed to interfere with this work.'

'I should be very sorry that it should be interfered with, my dear! It is a great privilege.'

'Yes, Mamma, I always did like to think of the women that wove the veils and hangings for the Ark; and don't you think one may trust this is a little like them?'

'Dear child, I like your thoughts; only you know a thing like this must be done in soberness and vigilance.'

'O Mamma, do you think such a matter could be only one of my flashes in the pan, as Papa says?'

'I think, my dear, you have sobered and steadied since your Confirmation, and I think this work, rightly managed, may be a great help to you in becoming still more steadfast.'

'I thought so, when it was first proposed,' said Joan, in a low voice; 'and Mamma, you will take care, please,' (such a lengthened insinuating please) 'that I am not beset and hunted about to gaieties now my aunt is coming.'

'We will see, my dear; I will do the best I can for you; but you must remember that it is one duty not to be ungracious, or hurt people's feelings.'

'And am I to have every opportunity of doing this in a self-denying way taken from me?' cried Joan, in a piteous voice.

'I hope not, dear child; but we must be quite sure whom we deny.'

And Mrs. Harding's whole voice and manner were so weary, that Joan, who, when free from opposition, had time to collect such consideration as she possessed, saw she must go no further, and drove on in a serene vision, quite sufficient to herself.

CHAPTER V.

THE KETTLE-DRUM.

THE large round table of the drawing-room at the Rectory had been cleared of all its ornaments and books, and Clara Braithwayte was helping Mrs. Henderson to set chairs for the party, measure off canvas, and divide the rainbow heap of richly coloured wools and silks into equal numbers of knots and skeins.

Clara was almost like a daughter to the house, which owned no daughters of its own. She was the middle one of the family of the senior curate; with two daughters older, two brothers younger, than herself. Emily, the eldest sister, had married very young; a very short time before the death of her mother had left Susan, the second, to be the hard-working diligent conductress of the household. Clara, the first who had been born in the present home, and god-child to both the Rector and his

wife, had had the run of the house from infancy; and, especially since the reins had been in Susan's hands, had been as much there as at home. It had even been under consideration whether she should accompany them to the Lakes; but her brother's holidays, and certain visits to their kindred, had conspired to cause this plan to be abandoned, and she was instead left in charge of many of Mrs. Henderson's minor offices; and among other matters deputed to her was the presidency of the six cushions. She was to keep the pattern in case anyone needed to refer to it; and if the supply of any of the wools fell short, she was authorized to order more; and if any difficulty arose, she was to write to Mrs. Henderson, being sure to have her direction. Clara was a very sober, steady-going, orderly person, to whom the trust might be committed with confidence, thought Mrs. Henderson, as she looked at the pleasant, smooth, plump cheeks, and honest eyes, bent on the skeins which her fingers were dexterously parting, so as to have no tangles, and to deal just measure to each. There was character, thought Mrs. Henderson, even in the way of dealing with a hank of worsted. Clara had done her own small commencement of the work, so as to leave the pattern free for the others, and make her own piece likewise available to copy from, and be at liberty to help them and her godmother; and she had also made the discovery, that the rich blue of the grounding was much disposed to soil the fingers of the worker, and what

was worse, the white wool of the lilies. There was a little controversy as to whether the lily whiteness could be best secured by working it in first or last, and in the midst—rather before the hour—Miss Harding was announced.

'Ah, Joanna! always the first. I hope your mother is pretty well.'

'Oh yes, thank you! Oh, how lovely! it is graceful and Gothic both at once. May I begin? or is it not fair on the rest?'

'I think you had better begin, as you will sooner set the pattern free for others. But would you not take off your hat first?'

Joan's hat, holland jacket, and gloves, went two or three ways at once; and while Clara, with a little expressive lifting of her eyebrows, put them evenly on the sofa in the back drawing-room, she had pounced on the pattern, and without the preliminary of opening a skein, had seized on one thread of the whitest of the whites, and was detaching it from the rest by a breakage at each end, leaving the skein a helpless twist.

'Oh, take care, Joan!' exclaimed Clara; 'you can't begin with that! See, I have made a hole in the middle stitch of the pattern. It is that bit of green leaf.'

Joan wriggled her shoulders almost imperceptibly, and observed that she hated green leaves; nevertheless she submitted, and took up a green skein.

'You had better open it properly,' said Mrs. Henderson rather severely, for she thought this an

unpropitious beginning, 'or you will spoil and waste the wool.'

'I've no scissors here, and Bennet will do it up for me. She always tidies Mamma's wools for her.—Oh, thank you!' as Clara cut the green into lengths for her.

'And,' added Mrs. Henderson, 'you had better put in the white at the last; for Clara finds that the blue comes off upon it.'

'Oh! shall I have the ground to do first? How horrid! that is like all the bread first and the butter last!'

'Nevertheless, Joanna, you must follow rules, if this work is to be real and not a toy.'

Joan pouted a moment. Mrs. Henderson was not nearly so much beloved as the Rector, except by Clara, who had her in the very innermost place in her heart, along with her father, Susan, and the boys.

'I want it to be real,' said Joan, recovering herself in a moment, with her brown eyes moist with something like a tear. 'I will do exactly what you tell me, Clara; only it seems a pity to waste time on the lamb's wools and fuss, when I have to take off the pattern.'

'More haste worse speed, sometimes,' said the lady; but at that moment the door-bell rang, and Miss Maclaine was ushered in.

'It is just Fenella,' said the pretty Scotch tone behind the parlour-maid. 'Bride was very sorry, but she was obliged to go to Lightsmead with my

father; and she hoped you would let me take the pattern for the two of us.'

'Your sister is very much occupied,' said Mrs. Henderson, more graciously than if the insinuating modulations of Fenella's voice had not been mollifying.

'Oh yes. She is my father's companion, and my mother's right hand,' said Fenella, her face lighting, 'and just everything to us children.'

'Us children!' said Clara, laughing; 'I thought you were only a year younger!'

'Fourteen months; but oh, I'm a mere baby to Bride!' said Fenella, smiling with her honest pride in her elder sister. 'She always was the wiselike helpful body ever since she was three years old, and held me back when I was scared with the dog, and would have run into the burn.'

'You can't remember that?'

'No, I suppose not; but Mysie has told it so often that I always think I can.'

Fenella had not been idle while she talked; but, obeying the courteous sign she received, had disposed of her hat with the eagle's feather, and her black silk mantle, neatly beside Joan's, and had opened a large basket that she had brought with her. Thence she produced a large holland housewife, and comparing each wool with its corresponding shade in the paper pattern, she brought out her scissors, cut the skeins in lengths, and proceeded to run them, in regular gradations of tints, into their case.

The warning against the dangerous blue was duly given. This Bride had apprehended, and had advised the bringing of some white cotton to trace the flowers with, so as to leave them to the last.

'What patience you have!' Joan cried; 'it makes me yawn for you, to think of going through all that preliminary bore.'

'Bride would not like it at all if I brought it home in a swirl,' said Fenella, as her hands moved rapidly among the colours.

'After all, you will get the start of Camilla and Mary,' said Clara. 'I wonder what makes them so late.'

'Mary is always behind time,' said Mrs. Henderson; 'and I shall not be surprised if Miss West does not come at all.'

'Oh yes, she will!' exclaimed Joan; 'Edith Thetford told me that Mrs. West is running about boasting that Camilla is to make an association for the church-work with all the *élite* of the place.'

Then Joan felt she had said something unkind and gossiping, and bent down her head over her work to hide her shame; while Fenella observed that she must be a great trial to her daughter, and Clara wondered that Camilla was so different.

'She had a very good governess,' answered Fenella; 'she is very fond of her, and still corresponds with her. And then Mr. West is so very good and nice.'

There was a chorus of assent to this; and Joan was beginning to utter that often repeated question,

why the man who makes his own fortune is apt to be so much less vulgar than the womankind he raises with him; when at the very moment, to make them all most conscious and awkward, Miss West and Miss Rose were announced together.

Camilla began shyly to make apologies for being so late; and Mrs. Henderson, in her quick way, answered that it did not signify once in a way, but with a sound of warning that made Camilla blush up to the ears.

'I am afraid it was my fault, Mrs. Henderson,' said Mary Rose, in her low cooing voice; 'Miss West was so kind as to call for me, and I was not quite ready.'

'Oh!' was all the answer Mrs. Henderson vouchsafed, as she mentally compared the mile that Fenella had walked with the two hundred yards that Mary had been carried. How long, thought she, had Mary kept Miss West sitting in the sun before the door of the Turtle-nest?

Camilla had come provided with a blue glass egg containing exquisite working implements, rather too fine to use. Mary had brought nothing at all; and Mrs. Henderson was rather maliciously observing that she had better run home and fetch her thimble and needle, when Fenella good-naturedly fished both out of the tartan ribbon housewife in her bag.

The next event was that Dr. Henderson came in, said something kind to each, and after a short chat, that made all go on smoothly and good-humouredly, departed again to his study. His sharp-eyed wife

had in the meantime observed that out of the five, Fenella was the only worker who could work and enter into conversation at the same time. Joan was so busy with her needle and her counting that she seemed quite abstracted, and came back out of a dream when directly addressed; Clara and Camilla paused when they either spoke or were spoken to; and Mary sat all the time with her head bent over the work, but not setting a stitch. Mrs. Henderson had her doubts whether, if she had, they would have been to any purpose; and speedily on the Doctor's departure exclaimed,

'Mary, what are you about? Why, you have not begun in the middle!'

'I always begin with the top stitch,' said Mary; the same answer she had made to Clara a quarter of an hour before.

'But you will not have room. You have begun too low down. Look how much wider the edge you have left above is than Clara's.'

Mary made no direct answer, but by a calculation, that cost infinitely more time and toil than it would have taken to take out her small commencement, and begin in the right place, she proved to herself that there was room for the whole pattern on her canvas, and communicated the demonstration by signs to her two neighbours, Camilla and Clara. To be sure, the proof had been very laborious, had seemed more bewildering than convincing, and had delayed her much; but what was that to the meek triumph of never being in the wrong?

Clara was not certain of this, however, and said, 'It does not look as if there was room; besides, if there is, there will be nothing to turn down, and all the canvas will come fraying out.'

'I can manage it,' answered Mary, in her usual submissive tone, this time unnoticed by Mrs. Henderson, who was engaged with the tea-tray that had just come in.

By the time the party broke up, the pieces of canvas were in the following condition. Joanna had completed the first white lily and its leaves, all except the higher lights, which were to be put in last in floss silk. She would need no further recourse to the pattern, except that she had not marked the distance to which the grounding must extend on either side, nor the rows of shades that were to form the narrow perpendicular sides of the flat cushion; but, of course, this could easily be done afterwards. Her work was pulled a little tight, but had the freshness of quick execution.

Fenella Maclaine's piece was as large as Clara's, which had been done at leisure. It included the entire division of the pattern up to the place where it began to be repeated, with both ground and edge shading; but, to save time, it had all been done in half stitches, the crossing to be put in afterwards. It was perfectly flat and even, with no ends left at the back, and had the air of being done by a person who knew what she was about.

Camilla West had done a smaller piece than might have been expected; neatly, but as if she were not

practised enough to work quickly; and Mary Rose's piece was so small that she could not go on without borrowing the pattern. Her canvas, in the corner where she had been working, looked limp and pulled; but, as she explained, 'Clara had made her count, and that took up time.'

Dr. Henderson came in at the end, asked them good humouredly if they repented of their undertaking; augured that he should see something beautiful when he came home, and wished them good-bye as they went off their several ways, Clara alone remaining.

'I wonder how few I shall find done!' sighed Mrs. Henderson. 'I have no trust in anybody but you and that good Fenella.'

'Oh, by-the-by, Alice Coxe begged me to tell you that her governess is going to have a month's holidays in a fortnight, in case anyone should give out,' said Clara.

'Poor Alice! she will leave nothing undone for want of asking! Well, if anyone breaks down, I leave you at liberty to transfer the work to her, Clara; but what I expect is that no one will honestly give up, they will only not persevere. And a happy state shall we be in!'

CHAPTER VI.

THE DAUGHTERS OF GLENTARN.

'FEN! Oh, there you are at last! I say, do come and pour out our tea: here's Effie got a book, and no more good than a potato bogle.'

'Is Bride come in?' asked Fenella, pausing before entering among five young persons, whom the open door displayed.

'Yes; but Nurse caught her to hold the baby. Come, Fen—just look at Effie.'

Fenella put in her head rather unwillingly, for she much wanted to speak to Bride; and the school-room tea had no just claims upon her time or her sister's; but Angus and Nial, day-school boys of eleven and nine, dragged her in, and pointed to Effie, a very lank young lady of fourteen, who sat curled up in an impossible attitude, completely lost to the terrestrial world in a heap of newly-borrowed magazines. The big metal tea-pot, the tall jug of milk, and the five cups with names on them, and the broad pile of slices of bread and butter, were all ready; and nothing had yet been extracted from the lawful president, but, 'Presently—let me alone—I'll just finish this.'

Assault and battery were being meditated by the two boys, and their boylike companions, Eva and

Annie; and Fenella at once perceived that she must be the victim to peace.

'One moment,' she said; 'let me just run up and take off my hat, and speak to Bride; and I'll come and pour out tea in a few seconds.'

Mr. Maclaine of Glentarn was a Highland laird—a great man at home; but since his health had failed, so that his native air for eight months in the year would have been death to him, nobody but his wife, and of late his two elder daughters, knew how hard it was to make both ends meet, even when Glentarn was let for the shooting-season—the only time he could have spent there.

Few women of any degree led a more toilsome careful life than did Lady Euphemia Maclaine; and none had striven to bring up her daughters more sensibly; and she was reaping the benefit. Bride was her right-hand, and Fenella was Bride's; and the weight of the younger children on her hands was so far lessened to her by their exertions, that she had been known to say that fourteen children were much less trouble than seven.

Three of the sons were now out in the world; and there remained at home 'only nine children,' besides the two boys who were to return from school in a week's time.

Fenella was not at all surprised not to find her elder sister in their own room; but hastily laying down bag, hat, and cloak, she crossed the passage, and found Bride presiding over the three babies.

'I can't stop,' said Fenella hastily, 'or there will

be a hubbub in the school-room; but you will find it all in the bag in our room.'

And no one would have guessed—by the spirit with which Bride sang nursery-rhymes to her charge, or the merriment that passed between Fenella and the party round the tea-table—how much both wished to be elsewhere.

After a time they met again in their own room. When Fenella arrived there, Bride was already in her white evening dress, and hard at work.

'How nicely you have taken it off, Fen,' she said; 'we shall not need to trouble anyone about the pattern.'

'And is it not beautiful? Oh, I am so glad we have it to do! Yet it is larger than I expected. I am half afraid—'

'I have been calculating,' said Bride. 'See, there are exactly forty week-days between to-morrow and the 4th of September, when the work is to be given in. Let us leave ten days to spare in case of impossibilities. Then, see, I have drawn white threads across my piece of canvas, so as to mark thirty divisions. If we can each finish one of those every day we shall be safe.'

'It is a great piece!' said Fenella, rather dismayed. 'I think it would be easier to take a good spell when there chances to be time.'

'So we may; and that would be doing the work for the next day beforehand. Don't you see?'

'Yes; and I suppose it is safest.'

'And we must reckon our day's work from breakfast time to breakfast time,' added Bride. All the work done the day before will be so much beforehand; but my portion must be finished off while Eva is practising, before we go down to breakfast.'

'But that is your only time for illuminating!'

'I must give that up.'

'And return that lovely Book of Hours without having copied all the patterns, when you have been getting up so early for them all this time!'

'I can't help it. I can't do both.'

'But can't we work at this in lesson-time?'

'While Effie or Eva is reading, perhaps; but the others always grow inattentive if one works; or one does oneself, which is worse.'

'Yes,' said Fenella thoughtfully; 'and we must be very careful not to let the work be in anyone's way, or Mamma will not like it.'

'She scarcely likes it as it is,' said Bride; 'only she is always kind. But you know Glentarn was not the place to learn to like ornamental churches.'

'Dear Glentarn! And yet, Bride, I believe we shall be glad all our lives—at least, it will be our own fault if we are not—that we were obliged to come here in time for our Confirmation. Dr. Henderson has made us enter into things as nothing ever would have done at home.'

'Yes; and therefore I should be very sorry if we could not accomplish this work, at any sacrifice.'

'You mean not only out of gratitude to Dr. Henderson, but—'

Bride bent her head to show that the thought was understood without going further.

'Indeed,' added Fenella, 'I quite think we can manage it without fashing anybody with it at improper times, if I leave off reading any idle books to myself till it is done.'

Fenella had been making her toilette all the time they were talking; and she had afterwards crossed nearly all her morning's stitches, before the bell rang, and the two sisters ran down to the late dinner.

It was almost of course that there should be someone there besides the father, mother, and two girls. 'Glentarn' could not fall so far from his Highland hospitality as not to ask anyone to dinner who fell in his way: a custom which did not diminish Lady Euphemia's housekeeping difficulties, when out of the reach of her own moor, loch, garden, and poultry-yard.

This time the guest was Walter Bellenden, the second son of that sister of Captain Harding, who has been already mentioned as having taken Sans Souci, the largest house in the place, except perhaps Falconberg, and with a beautiful level lawn. He had been sent down unexpectedly that afternoon by his mother, to look at the house, and had been captured and borne off by Mr. Maclaine from the Hardings, in right of a long visit that Lady Bellenden and her two elder sons had once, some

years ago, paid at Glentarn, when they had become very intimate with the whole household, and especially the brothers now absent.

Walter Bellenden had in those days been a big school-boy, anxious to establish his manhood by noticing nothing younger than himself; Bride and Fenella, raw Scotch school-room girls, with manners by no means proportioned to the length of their limbs, and much resenting the English finery and airs, that despised them, and deprived them of the companionship of their brothers. There was a certain surprise in the present meeting: the one had become a polished easy-mannered gentleman, with the agreeableness and vivacity of a young law student; and the others had gained all that was wanting to make them civilized young ladies, without losing a certain racy Highland individuality, that became them very well, and stood them quite in the stead of beauty.

Mr. Bellenden liked the prospect of Sans Souci a great deal better than he had done when he first came down, and applied himself to telling Bride of his mother's grand designs of diversion. 'You must have a whole menagerie of lions,' he said; 'small and great, land and water.'

'Every species and variety,' answered Bride. 'There are those bonnie Greytorr rocks, and two or three castles; and the Culmbeach sands—the most delicious place for botanizing.'

'And,' added Fenella, 'the Pirate's Cave; and

St. Aldhelm's Abbey, which is so delightful to sketch.'

'Pic-nic traps without end,' said Mr. Bellenden; 'just what we looked out for. And moreover, I have the pleasure to inform you that Sans Souci is reported to possess the only available croquet ground in the place.'

'It is like a piece of water kept open for a decoy,' laughed Bride.

'Well, exactly so my excellent cousin Joan seemed to view it. A pretty little thing Joan is growing up—not that she will ever come up to her mother.'

'Yes, Joan is very pretty; but Mrs. Harding has the very loveliest countenance I ever did see!' exclaimed Fenella enthusiastically.

'By-the-by, what is come to Joan?' continued Walter Bellenden. 'Is she coming out in the high strong-minded line? She professes not to have time for anything—and purses up her lips like a lady abbess, when one does but mention croquet or pic-nic; and in fact, appears superior to everything.'

To this Fenella and Bride made little answer but a laugh; and he added, 'The little ones tell me there is some church work going, that everybody is bent upon—and that Joan's heart is to be sewn up in a cushion. I hope you are not under the same spell.'

'You will see,' returned Bride.

'But are you two vowed Sisters of the Cushion?'

tragically demanded Walter: 'if so—adieu to pic-nics, adieu to lions—a long farewell to Sans Souçi. The landlords may bring an action against the clerics for depreciating the value of the houses, by diminishing the attractions of the place.'

'I think there are quite people enough without the cushion workers,' said Fenella.

'And are you one?' He put his hand on his heart with tokens of dismay at the affirmative sign, and looked at the other sister.—'And you— ?'

He fell back in his chair with a gesture of despair; and the sisters were glad that the announcement of dinner put an end to the inquiry into their avocations, before father or mother had noticed it; for much that might quietly be tolerated at first, and gradually liked in growing-up girls, would be assuredly blighted at once if obtruded.

After dinner, Effie was found in the drawing-room, still immersed in the magazine story she had just finished, and crazy to find someone to sympathize in her passion for the hero.

Angus and Nial were no readers; Eva was not allowed to meddle with the magazine; and Effie fastened at once upon Fenella; while Mamma and Bride went off to see about the little ones going to bed, and to hear their evening prayers.

'Fen, it is the most delicious story in the world! Shall I fetch you the first number? I dare say you would have time before the gentlemen come in.'

'I had rather you told me the story, thank you, Effie my dear. I think we ought not to keep the books any longer. Mamma does not much like their being about in the way of Eva and Annie.'

'Oh, you could read it very quickly up in your own room,' said Effie, who having borrowed the magazines, had not found them greatly welcomed, and had been left alone in her engrossing excitement in the story.

'Yes; but that is just what I can't do. I have not time—'

'What, that work?'

'Yes, Effie; I promised myself that I would not let my head get into a story till it was done.'

'Just this one,' pleaded Effie; 'it is so grand and noble—and quite historical too.'

'No, no, Effie. "Just this one" is the fatal saying. Besides, you really do tell stories so well, that it will be a great enlivenment to me to hear you.'

How much did Fenella wish to read the book? She could have wished it considerably—indeed, she had felt half defrauded when someone else had seized the first numbers the day before. Now she was glad that she had not even begun; for it was the less difficult to keep her resolution.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STAY-AT-HOMES.

'AH! there they go!' said Mary plaintively, from the oriel of the Turtle-nest, as she sat with her cushion on her lap, and the pattern before her.

'Who go, my love?' Mrs. Rose had not turned her head quick enough to see.

'The carriages to Lady Bellenden's pic-nic, Mamma. Much chance the work will have!'

'Ah! my sweet one, I never thought that the labour of love would contend with the charms of gaiety.'

'I cannot think how they can answer it to themselves to go. Why, I have only done this piece.'

'Yes, my love, but the humble tortoise always comes up with the volatile hare. Besides, you have been hindered by that unfortunate commencement.'

For Mary, having meandered down to the bottom of her canvas, had there found that her counting had been wrong, and Clara right; so without picking out the blunder, she had turned the canvas round, and begun again, rolling up the false beginning out of sight.

'Joan Harding has got to her third lily,' she said, with a weary sigh, as she held out her first leaf to look at.

'Remember the tortoise, my child.'

'But Joan is not gone, Mamma. It is only the Maclaines and Miss West.'

'Fashion and wealth. Ah! we shall see them yet surpassed by humble self-devotion.'

It *did* for a moment cross Mary's mind that she had not had the choice of refusing the pic-nic, for the good reason that Lady Bellenden did not know there was any such person in existence; but it was much more pleasant to regard the enforced staying at home as voluntary abstinence from pomps and vanities, and to look down with superior pity from her Turtle-nest upon those deluded beings, who were, no doubt, neglecting their lilies for the display of feathers and gauds.

It was true that Joanna Harding was staying at home, all by herself, and working at lily the third. She had had a very hard fight for it. Lady Bellenden was one of the most good-natured people in the world, and could not bear to see anyone lose a pleasure, and the bringing forward of her niece had been one of her views in taking Sans Souci; so that her vexation had been great in finding Joanna so entirely absorbed, and set against all diversions.

It was Mrs. Harding who had the brunt of the battle. Her husband had begun by demanding of her what nonsense Joan had in her head, and desiring her to put a stop to it. To which the gentle mother replied that it was a little fever, only a little fever, and that she thought it would

be better to let it run its course, so that Joan might learn judgment by experience and come to her senses again, rather than be exasperated by opposition and thus tempted to become self-willed. So she earnestly entreated that Captain Harding would have patience; and he reluctantly answered that his wife must have it her own way about the girls; but he would not stand this if it went on long.

Mrs. Harding reported Papa's reluctant consent; and Joan was as much transported with gratitude as most girls would have been if a succession of gaieties had been promised to them.

Nor did she know that Mamma submitted to go through much more from her ladyship, who imagined that she was bringing up Joan to be a morbid contemner of all the pleasures of this life, and that she was sacrificing her daughter to the fancies of an invalid. Lectures were administered not only to Mrs. Harding but to the Captain, though these last had a rather happy effect, since they only determined him the more that his wife should manage her children as she pleased without interference from his sister.

Yet Mrs. Harding herself had almost besought her daughter—while leaving her choice quite free—to join the party. 'You see, my dear, it need not take up very much of your time, so forward as you are too with your work; and it seems ungracious to mortify your aunt.'

'There are so many, Mamma—all the rest of us—nobody can miss me.'

'Besides, I don't quite like, when your aunt is so good-natured, to trouble her with little Nina and Rose, without any elder one except Miles to see after them.'

'But Miss Clay goes, does not she?'

'True; but it is hard on a poor little governess to have the children always on her hands at a party of pleasure, and not to be able to enjoy herself.'

'I don't suppose I should do her much good,' said Joanna.

Which was true. Joan was always meaning to be very kind and helpful to Miss Clay, but never finding the moment when she was not too busy about something else.

'And are not the Maclaines going?'

'Oh yes; but they are no rule. They never give up anything!'

'Your aunt stayed with them so long at Glentarn, that I suppose they feel that it would be unkind to refuse her invitation.'

'Besides, Lady Euphemia is not like you, Mamma; she would not be content without their going out. But I do not believe they *can* finish in time.'

'After all, Joan dearest,' poor Mrs. Harding still ventured to say, 'you know this would hardly take you longer than your needful exercise; and you have done a great deal in one week.'

'Yes, Mamma; but I have made my resolution.' And Joan's face looked as severe and stern as its soft prettiness would allow.

Mrs. Harding took her resolution, which was that,

health and weather permitting, she would go to the party herself, and take charge of Nina and Rose. Weather was fine, she was rather better than usual; so, though she had much rather have been left in peace, she expressed her willingness to take the drive; and Captain Harding and Miles were so transported that they quite forgot to be angry with Joan.

Joan sat at home, felt very sublime, and worked at her lily. But working cross-stitch in solitude was less lively than so doing with her mother to talk to, so she thought she would enliven her work with occasional glances at a book. By five o'clock the book was finished, but not so lily the third!

The other stay-at-home was Clara Braithwayte. It was a case of neither being asked, nor of once thinking of the pic-nic, and very little of the lilies, though they had gone on very quietly and steadily, and two with all their adjacent foliage were complete. An entreaty had that morning arrived, that Susan would come to Emily, the eldest sister, as soon as possible, since her husband had been sent for suddenly to attend a sick brother in Germany, and Emily was not well nor strong enough to be left with her two tiny children alone in a very lonely country parish. The visit to Emily had long been intended, but it was not to have begun till after the holidays, and it was even debated for a short time whether Clara had not better be sent on the present emergency, and

exchange with Susan later. But it was a long journey into Lincolnshire, and expense and escorts were both considerations; Susan could go alone, but Mr. Braithwayte did not like to send Clara by herself, and could not go with her when Dr. Henderson's absence left him and a young deacon in sole charge of the parish.

Susan was to go up by a late train to London, sleep there, and proceed the next day. So the packing was going on, and Susan was making over to Clara the many occupations of her life—household and parish, and above all, to look after Freddy. Freddy was eight years old, went to the same day-school as did Angus and Nial Maclaine, and had yet never been left behind by Susan since she had the management of the house.

'Don't let Freddy be too much driven and hunted about by Johnny when he comes home,' implored Susan. 'I am sure Johnny is inclined to bully him.'

'I know,' said Clara, 'you are distressed at every squeak of Freddy's, and I really think that is often the cause that he makes such a fuss if anyone does but touch him!'

'Now Clara!' cried Susan, really distressed and grieved. 'You always do take part with Johnny; and if you give up my poor little Freddy to his tender mercies, I cannot tell what is to become of the poor little man. I must speak to Papa. Or could I take him?'

'Nonsense, Susan,' said Clara. 'Of course I will

do my best to take care of Freddy, and keep him out of mischief.'

'Take care! You know that is not what I mean! Of course you will take care in a certain sort of way; but I can't bear to think of the poor dear little fellow missing me and being unhappy; and if you are always taken up with that work of yours, and letting him tear about with Johnny all day, I don't know what is to become of him.'

'Indeed, Susie, I will do my best,' said Clara humbly. 'I will do all I can to keep him safe, if he will only mind me.'

'All he wants is to be spoken to properly,' said Susan. 'And you will take care about his not getting wet feet. Oh, and mind if there is veal, that there is something besides for him at dinner.'

'What! do you mean that Freddy can't eat veal yet?'

'He can't bear it—I thought you knew—and so I always have something else at dinner, or else Papa would get so much displeased with him.'

There was an ever-growing consternation in Clara's mind. She had, in many a little fit of vexation, been of opinion that it would be much better for Master Frederick if Susan did not indulge and shield him continually; and the more she was warned of the tenderness she must exercise, the more formidable did her task appear. She had no power at all. Her only chance hitherto of dealing with Freddy had been to be firm and sharp with him, and make him feel her authority

not despicable; and if she must promise Susan to be extremely amiable, and pursue the old system—adieu to all hopes of good management! But was this all crossness and unkindness? Clara really thought so, blamed herself accordingly, took home shame for having spoken harshly of the darling, and promised all possible consideration for him—all without satisfying Susan that she would be half careful enough of him.

'I really am sorry to leave you with so much on your hands, my dear,' said Susan, 'especially when you have that work to do; I suppose you would not like to let me take it away with me. I shall have plenty of time at Emily's, and it could be easily settled with Mrs. Henderson.'

'Oh no, Susan, thank you,' said Clara, with tears in her eyes; 'I should be so very much disappointed not to do it. I promised, you know; and it would be so horrid, for me, who am in charge of all, to be the first to give up. Oh! I have quite time. I can work all the evening, you know; and Joan is the only one who has got before me. I am sure, if the Maclaines can manage it, I can.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONSPIRACY.

'I SAY,' cried Herbert Bellenden, next brother to Walter, and just blossoming out of the school-boy, 'this is too bad! I'd never have come to this place if I had known we were to be treated like this.'

'All the fun spoilt all through the holidays!' chimed in Charles Harding.

'What?' exclaimed Angus Maclaine in intense amazement.

'They are all pining because they can't get any of the beauty and fashion to be sensible of their attractions,' murmured the far superior Walter Bellenden, over his cigar, as he lay on the grass under a tree that shaded the croquet ground of Sans Souci.

'For the girls!' burst out Johnny Braithwayte, with ineffable amazement and disgust, as he looked at his elders. 'Who wants them?'

'Ah!' said Herbert, with his hands in his pockets, 'you are a little shaver that don't know any better! One's got enough of one's own sort all the half; and if the women-folk won't condescend to make themselves pleasant in the holidays, what do they get board and lodging for, I'd like to know?'

'They must be brought to their bearings,' quoth Charles. 'There's that sister of mine giving herself

intolerable airs about some worsted work or trash that it seems the old Doctor has given her to do.'

'Yes, that's it,' responded the lesser Braithwayte, who perceived that it was *the thing* to be aggrieved, 'they have got six cushions among them to do for the church; and my sister Clara is one of them.'

'Well,' said Herbert, 'I propose the sentiment that this is an intolerable invasion of domestic peace.'

'Spiritual despotism—that's the ticket,' put in Walter.

'Hear! hear!' cried Charles; 'as if any doctor of them all had any right to lay hold of our womankind in the holidays.'

And 'Hear! hear!' echoed little Fred Braithwayte, who having been used to hear the Doctor's will treated as law, thought these liberal sentiments magnificently manly.

'Resolved then,' continued Herbert, 'that it is the duty and pride of every free-born Briton to resist priestcraft and spiritual despotism wherever they exist, nip the monster in the bud, etcetera; and that therefore it is resolved that these same six cushions be thwarted, opposed, and abolished, by all the members of this honourable assembly. Ay or no?'

Six voices shouted 'Ay,' three did not shout at all, and two cried 'No,' one of them so emphatically that Charles Harding turned round on his elder brother with 'Hollo! Miles, I thought you were

more bothered with Joan's nonsense than any of us!'

'Well, but is that any reason for setting on to bully a girl out of what she has undertaken to do?'

'That is your untutored mind, allow me to observe,' said Herbert. 'No such measures were spoken of—civilization has surer methods.'

'No method at all will make it fair usage,' said Miles; 'besides, if you let her alone, the thing will be done, and there will be an end of it, and she will be ready for whatever is going, like a jolly girl as she is.'

'My dear fellow, it is the principle we object to, not the individual,' said Herbert mildly. 'We find our pic-nics a desert, our croquet deserted; no music regales us, no cheerful conversation, no walks, none of that sympathy which it is woman's privilege to give, and man condescends to accept! I ask, is it to be tolerated? Shall one old parson make sempstresses of all our fairest?'

'I should like to know,' interrupted Miles, 'whether—except that sister of mine, who is always in a course of little frenzies—you have the least notion who is doing those cushions?'

'*My* sister is!' squeaked out Freddy.

'Miss Maclaine is. I extorted that confession,' added Walter coolly.

'Well,' said Malcolm Maclaine, the eldest brother now at home, 'and I don't see that it interferes with anything. Our lassies are just like themselves—always ready when one wants them. They always

have some woman's work about, and what for no?'

'Because we don't choose to be sacrificed to a priestly despot,' returned Herbert Bellenden. 'We choose to keep up domestic discipline.'

'You've not got a sister of your own,' said Malcolm composedly. 'But never mind, you'll not get much by trying that on upon mine.'

'Shall I lay you a bet?'

'I never bet, and certainly not on my sisters.'

'Well, well,' said the elder Bellenden, conscious perhaps that his brother had gone too far; 'but, agreed that no warning is given, do you defy the assembled company to produce an effect on your sisters?'

'I defy no one,' said Malcolm, 'but you may do what you please about my sisters, for I know it will make no difference.—Come, Angus, we are doing no good here.'

There was a laugh as the Scotch lads went away; and Charles observed, 'Well, as to the younger one something may be done, but the other is a stunner. Even her brothers knock under to her.'

'The sublime Bride is not for an ordinary genius,' murmured Walter.

'Walter undertakes Bride,' said Charles, laughing. 'Well, who else is on the enemy's side?'

'My sister Clara!' repeated Freddy.

'Oh, of course—the Curate's daughter must,' said Herbert, weary of the little imp, and determined to set him down.'

'I'll stop it, though,' the more savagely muttered Freddy.

'Who else?' No one could tell—till Freddy again said, 'Miss West, and Mary Rose.'

'Miss West! Murder in Irish!' quoth Walter suddenly.

'Mary Rose! Hav'n't the pleasure of the lady's acquaintance,' said Herbert.

'Oh, a dowager curate's daughter,' said Charles. 'Lives in that pensive pepper-box, the Turtle-nest, up the Church Road. The Mock-turtle we call her.'

'Oh, very well; she and this little chap's sister are just fit to do the whole lot among them. Sha'n't be interfered with.'

At this moment a message came out from the house that Master Frederick Braithwayte's sister had called for him. Master Frederick's state of mind may be more easily conceived than described.

CHAPTER IX.

VI ET ARMIS.

'WHAT can be the matter with my work-basket?' said Clara, half in soliloquy. 'Can the kitten have got into it? Surely I left it shut up.—O Pussy, Pussy, you are very white and pretty, but you are remarkably naughty. Catch me ever leaving you

alone here again. To think of your having made such a tangle of Mrs. Henderson's wools! Here are all the greens and the whites knotted together in the most inextricable way! Why, this is real tying and plaiting. That is past you, Pussy.—Johnny, what do you mean? I am sure Puss never did all this! my needle and thimble are gone too. You don't mean that Freddy did it?'

John's silence was decisive on that score. He was free from all suspicion of having done the mischief himself; but Clara knew very well that he would not speak to tell tales of his brother, and she did not know that he felt equally bound not to reveal the plot at Sans Souci.

'It is very vexatious!' Clara went on; 'I shall have to waste half the evening in disentangling this wool; and indeed, I could not use it till I have seen by daylight what his little paws may have done to it! Really, Johnny, you should prevent him from doing such things!'

Johnny arched up his eyebrows.

'The needle and thimble too!' sighed Clara. 'Of course I don't mind the needle, but it is the gold thimble Dr. Henderson gave me. I would not lose it for anything.'

Johnny screwed his eyes towards a corner of the room. She followed the direction, much as children play at drawing-room hide-and-seek. 'Not in the bowl! No! Not in the cupboard. Oh! it is impossible that boy can have put it into the dormouse's cage!'

The corners of John's mouth turned up.

'Now really!—My pretty little Dor, just let me look in. No, it is only I; don't let those black eyes of yours get so frightened.—Watch the cat, Johnnie. —No, no, Mousie, great idle boys shall not put horrid hard things into his bed, to spoil all his comfort when he rolls himself up in his dear little soft ball! Oh! Mousie, don't you wish Susan was at home?'

'Susan used to be more tender about that little plague than you are,' said Johnny. 'I can't think why you don't lick him into shape. Now is the time, but you let him be more obstreperous than even she does.'

'I promised Susan, or she could not have gone away in comfort,' said Clara.

'Deluded child!' was all that Johnny said. 'I pity you!'

Clara spent her evening in untwisting and disentangling, privately vowing stern lectures to Freddy, and when most vexed at some intolerable knot, almost resolving to speak to her father. Sleep, however, dissipated some of her indignation, and brought her back to the ordinary temper in which she would bear anything rather than draw her father's displeasure upon her little brother.

It must be confessed that Master Frederick Braithwayte was rather an ill-conditioned boy, not utterly undeserving of the aversion with which Mrs. Henderson regarded him. He had lost his mother too early to be trained by her, and his father was

too busy to attend to him. Susan had been terribly frightened by a threatening of water on the brain, and had been told to let him learn nothing, never be contradicted, and never cry. Do doctors, who give such advice, know how impossible it is that a child should not cry all the more for having nothing to do, and a surfeit of its own way? At any rate, Freddy had been her hourly tyrant, till, when the danger was supposed to be past, his father sent him to the day-school, where the chief thing he had yet learnt was contempt for his sisters; and in holiday time, it was no small affair for Clara to have him on her hands, with the necessity of getting his holiday task into his memory too, with all his will set against it.

As soon as her first morning avocations were over, Clara settled herself as usual in the drawing-room, and called Fred as he was lounging about doing his best to interrupt his brother; who, having been set to work by his father in the study, was busy over his books with as much good-will as could be expected of a boy of twelve in the holidays.

'Now, Freddy, I want to speak to you,' said Clara gravely. Freddy cast himself on the carpet. 'I know very well that you made all that mess of my work.' He twinkled his eye, held up his fingers, and looked at her as through a spy-glass. 'Now, you are often very tiresome and provoking about my things; but when they are only my own, that is not so bad; but I tell you these wools are not mine, they are Mrs. Henderson's, and the work is for the

church. Yes, it is for the church, Freddy, and you know it is really wrong to hinder that.'

It was a fact only too notorious to everybody except Mr. Braithwayte himself, that his own little boy was the worst behaved little boy in the congregation; and moreover, Mrs. Henderson could hardly entertain such an opinion of Master Freddy as she did, without the aversion being reciprocal. Nevertheless, there was so much grace about him, that, but for the speeches he had heard from his elders, he would hardly have growled out, 'Bother Mrs. Henderson, you are not her nigger.'

'Freddy, you are saying what is very disrespectful and improper. Do you remember who Mrs. Henderson is?'

Freddy made a grimace.

'If you please, Ma'am, Cook wants to speak to you.'

Clara went away, to be informed, with all the despotism of a cook over a vice-mistress, that nothing was to be had for dinner but a fillet of veal. Angry as Clara was with Freddy, her promise to Susan was not forgotten; and she almost besought that eggs and bacon, patties, or some second dish, should be added; then, with a sort of vague answer, 'Very well, Ma'am, I'll see about it,' went back.

Behold! Not only Freddy, but her whole piece of work, had vanished! She was half beside herself with vexation, anxiety, and indignation! A hasty search showed her it was no surface hiding; and she was just rushing into the study to demand John's counsel and assistance, when there was a ring at the

front door, and the outline that loomed through the ground glass caused her to bolt all the faster into the study.

'O Johnny, Johnny, there's that little wretch made away with my work again, the whole piece this time. And there's Mary Rose ringing at the door, and when I shall ever get her out of the house again no mortal knows! O Johnny, do pray catch him, and don't let him do any mischief to it, or what will become of me?'

'I'll tackle him!' said John resolutely. 'I only wish he was not so small.'

'Miss Rose in the drawing-room, Ma'am.'

'Ah!' and Clara went.

Mary Rose was there, saying, 'I don't interrupt you, do I, dear? I only wanted you to give me some of the middle shade of yellow for the stamens of the lilies.'

'There are not three shades in the stamens.'

'Oh! I am sure there are by the pattern, and so is dear Mamma.'

'No one has done them so,' said Clara; 'we have all made two shades do.'

Mary begged to look at Clara's own piece of work, and thus necessitated the confession—which Clara had rather have made to any of the five rather than Mary—that her little brother had hidden it, and it was not at the moment forthcoming. Mary looked mildly astounded, and at that moment a shout caused both to look out, and behold the half-worked piece of canvas waving as a banner from the

top of a long pole which Freddy was endeavouring to plant in the ground; but at the same time, with a loud whoop and war-cry, Johnny leapt headlong out from the study window. Freddy took to his heels, dropping the prey after a moment; and Clara, in her turn springing from the open window of the drawing-room, flew frantically after her work, secured it, and rushed panting back to the grave and astonished Mary.

How Freddy fared in Johnny's hands Clara was much too angry with him to wish to know. Mary was too meek to make remarks, but she thought the more. Very little damage had really been done to the work, though the unused part of the canvas had been rumpled, and its fresh stiffness destroyed. The colour of the stamens was clearly here only two shades, but Mary was tardy of being convinced. 'It ought to be three, at any rate,' she said; 'would Clara come and look at the pattern, and write to Mrs. Henderson?'

'Really,' said Clara, 'I don't see the use. The wools were all sorted at the shop, and the point is not whether the cushions are all exactly like the pattern, but whether they are like each other.'

'Where is Mrs. Henderson now?'

'At Kendal; but I do not like to teaze her.'

'I like exactness,' said Mary; and to herself she added, 'Nobody is in earnest but little me!'

'Cannot you spare the pattern?' said Clara presently. 'Camilla told me she should be glad to see it again.'

'Not quite yet, please,' softly said Mary. 'I am sure Miss West cannot want it. She is always going out with those fine people at Sans Souci, and singing all day long with them. Do you think hers will ever be finished, Clara?'

'I can't tell. She has no little brother,' said Clara; 'but Mrs. Henderson never thought she would do it.'

'And do you know, Clara,' in a mysterious, much shocked voice, 'they are having croquet parties, and dances, and pic-nics, continually at Sans Souci; and the Maclaines are always there. Is it not a dreadful thing that Lady Bellenden should have come among our quiet set?'

'She does not seem to be doing you and me much harm,' said Clara.

'No. Mamma and I are so thankful to be sheltered by our position from all the temptations of the world. Are not you, Clara?'

Clara, who had been answering hitherto rather off-hand, chiefly wishing to be able to go and see what Johnny was about, paused and answered, 'Really, I don't see any harm in it in moderation. I own I should like some of the fun. I wish they would ask me to go to the Castle ruin. I have never seen it.'

'Oh! You would not go with a noisy, fashionable, flirting party? Why, even Miss Harding refuses! Only think, the party that came home in the break were singing all the way, and Camilla West was there!'

'Not as they went through the town?'

'Not quite so bad as that, but quite up to the turnpike; and our maid Jane heard them! Mamma says it is quite a public misfortune that such people as those Bellendens are come, going on in such a way with Miss West and the Maclaines; only she thinks it a most fortunate thing that it is just now, when the failure in the work must open Dr. Henderson's eyes; and perhaps their own—only, perhaps, they may not care, poor dears. We did hope better things of them once.'

There is infinite satisfaction in being superior to the worldly delights that are out of reach; and Clara, after the first, seeing that she must submit to a visitor who was devoid of the faculty of taking leave, became interested in deploring the enormities of that fashionable vortex that seemed to have engulfed all the other cushion workers; and there was no small pleasure, covert though it was, in the anticipation that these two curates' daughters, with Joanna Harding, if she continued to hold out, would alone share the glory of presenting the cushions.

'Perhaps,' at last suggested Mary, 'Camilla might be asked to yield her cushion to Alice Coxe.'

'No,' said Clara bluntly; 'that would make Alice Coxe more forward than ever; I had rather finish them all myself than set her up in that way. She would never get over the triumph.'

'I think it would spoil her,' assented Mary; and there was a little more sitting in judgment over Alice Coxe; her request to take a class at the

Sunday school, her discontent at having only little ones allotted to her; the mare's nests she was apt to discover about their dress and conduct; and her burning desire to become a district visitor.

Moralizing on other people was so pleasant, that Clara did not find out what a great hole had been made in her morning, till the sound of the clock startled both with the proclamation of early dinner-time. Mary took her leave; and Clara, warned by experience, locked up her work in the chiffoniere, before obeying the summons of the bell.

Her father and both boys were there; the covers were taken off. Clara looked anxiously. Papa had the brown fillet of veal before him. She had bacon before her—potatoes on one side, peas on the other. Alas! Papa carved, asking no questions; the plates were taken round. Mr. Braithwayte was relating some fact he had learnt at the reading-room, when there was a gulping sobbing noise—then a roar! Mr. Braithwayte stopped short in consternation. 'Freddy, Freddy, are you ill? Are you hurt?'

Roar! Roar!

'He is not ill! It is the veal,' said Clara, in the utmost distress.

'Veal!' exclaimed Mr. Braithwayte.

'It's nasty—nasty veal,' howled Freddy, fancying commiseration in their voices. 'Susan never made me eat it, and it is all to spite me.'

'For shame, Sir!' was all he got by this speech, in a voice, from his father, such as he had never heard before; which made him hold his breath.

'Indeed,' pleaded Clara, 'I did beg the cook to send in something besides for him.'

'Did you?' said his father. 'I am ashamed to hear it.—I had no notion a great boy like you could be so foolish, and encouraged in your folly. I'll have no more of this. Eat your dinner at once; or else go away from the table, and have none!'

Freddy got up, sobbing, and scowling at his sister, feeling himself making a case against her.

And Clara began to intercede. 'O Papa, Papa, he is not used to it; Susan never made him do it. He will have no dinner at all.'

'So much the better, unless he will learn to eat what is wholesome,' said Mr. Braithwayte. 'Don't stand sobbing there, Frederick. Either go out of the room, or sit down and eat.'

It had come to Frederick! They were all appalled; but sobbing not being an appetizing operation, Freddy preferred departing. There was not much chance of his being fed elsewhere, as there was no old nurse in the case.

'A favourite has no friend.'

And Susan had let him make himself so troublesome to the servants, that no one had any mercy on him. Clara's appetite was almost as much gone as was his. She was very sorry on his account, and felt herself a traitor to Susan; and when her father, in a compassionate voice, observed, 'Poor little fellow!' she looked up hopefully, and said, 'Oh! Papa, may not I take him a bit of pudding? It is a dog-in-a-blanket, and that *would* be something solid!'

'He does not deserve it,' said Mr. Braithwayte, on hearing of this exquisite delicacy. 'But, Clara, do you mean to say that Susan has really given way to the boy's daintiness to such an extent as this?'

'I hardly knew it, Papa; but you know how little appetite he used to have; and indeed, it is very hard upon him to have the trial come so suddenly. I would have helped it if I could.'

'I suppose so,' said Mr. Braithwayte, in an odd half-contemptuous way. 'What nonsense could the boy have meant about spite?'

'Oh, nothing,' said Clara cheerfully, for she saw the storm was blowing away from her naughty little persecutor; 'his own conscience, I suppose, made him say so; for he has been playing tricks with my work, and perhaps he thought I was taking my revenge.' And she laughed at the ridiculous idea.

'With your work? Not with the cushion, I hope.'

'Yes; but, luckily, he has not done it any harm. I must take better care in future.'

'You must not let him be too troublesome,' said Mr. Braithwayte.

And therewith the dog-in-a-blanket making its appearance, Clara cut three beauteous slices, with spiral rings of black currant alternating with suet; and herself carried them in quest of the culprit, who sat sulking on the stairs.

He did not deign to accept the pudding, or pardon her; but she left it by him, with the conviction that it would soon disappear.

After dinner, Mr. Braithwayte called him; and spoke kindly and gravely to him of the consideration his health had once demanded, but of the duty of conquering fanciful habits of indulgence. It may be feared that Freddy did not attend to it, but thought it 'a jaw' brought on him by Clara; and stopped his ears by the pitying himself for the vista of veal he saw before him till Susan's return.

And when his father ended with 'Your sister is very forbearing; I cannot have her tormented, nor her work interfered with;' this ill-used individual thought she had been complaining, and vowed further vengeance to the work. Should she mind Mrs. Henderson, or anyone save his own great self?

And because Clara had become too prudent ever to leave work or wools unguarded for a moment, stronger opposition worked up in him; and he began not so much to struggle against her task, as against herself!

'O Clara, I forgot,' said Mr. Braithwayte, putting his head back into the room. 'You know I am to dine at Cape Verd to day; I met Captain Harding, and he asked you to come for the evening; there's some music, I believe. He said you had better come at seven, and drink tea with Joanna, as she does not come in to dinner. I said you should.'

'Very well, Papa; but—the boys—'

'The boys must take care of themselves. They are quite old enough.'

And Clara was left to some excitement and some trepidation. She had never yet been to any of the

numerous evening parties of the place. Her sister was the representative Miss Braithwayte; and even she very seldom went out. Parish engagements or services occupied most evenings; and her father's mourning for his wife had lasted long, and created habits of seclusion.

What dress should she wear? How should she behave? Was not this the vortex of dissipation that the Roses were always warning people against! Ah! but it was Papa's doing! It must be right!

CHAPTER X.

FORE-WARNED FORE-ARMED.

FENELLA was dressing Bride's hair. Bride was to be one of the dinner party; Fenella to join the company in the evening after drinking tea with Joan Harding, as the table was too full to admit all the 'come out' members of the families invited.

'I have had a confidence to-day,' said Fenella, as she plaited the profuse tresses of reddish gold. 'Effie tells me that she hears from Angus that there is a regular plot against our cushions.'

'Plot! what does the lassie mean?'

'Just that all those idle boys have taken offence at our doing anything but wait on their sovereign

pleasure, and have agreed to do everything in their power to prevent us from finishing them.'

'Not our own boys,' said Bride securely.

'No, they would have nothing to do with it. They said it was no concern of theirs what work we chose to do; but all the rest have promised one another to hinder the six cushions in every possible way.'

'All the rest? Whom do you mean?'

'Why, the whole party of—callants, as Mysie would say. Charles Harding and Herbert Bellenden began about it, and Mr. Walter Bellenden himself gave in to it.'

'No no, Fenella, it must be some daft fancy of the laddies'.'

'I don't think they could have fancied it,' said Fenella. 'Effie says Angus reported they had wonderful clavers about domestic discipline and spiritual tyranny, and a great deal that Malcolm had called nonsense; and at last they all, except Miles Harding, agreed to make it their business to prevent us; and Malcolm said at last they might do as they pleased with us, for all the rugging and reiving in the world would make no odds to us.'

'We are much obliged to Malcolm for his good opinion,' laughed Bride; 'but of course it is only some absurdity of the younger boys, when they were vexed with Joan for making such a work as she does about her cushion, which Angus may have taken up seriously. Did you ask Malcolm?'

'No; I was going, but Effie said that Malcolm

would be mad with Angus for telling her; and then it came out that it was Mr. Bellenden who had bargained for no warning being given. I really think they mean it for a trial of their power against —better things.'

'That would be making out ourselves and our cushions of much more consequence than we are with the young gentlemen,' said Bride. 'No, no, depend on it, it is some chatter that Angus has taken up by the wrong end, and Effie's brilliant imagination has dressed up. Mr. Bellenden would not do anything so silly and thoughtless.'

'Well, I shall judge a little how it has been with Joan,' said Fenella; 'it is no harm to be on one's guard.'

'Not at all; only there is no use in making a disturbance, and accusing everybody. What o'clock is it? Not six. We shall have time to do a little, then.'

'I hope so,' said Fenella, 'for we shall have a great piece to finish to get our portion done for to-morrow morning. Really, evening parties do take up one's time terribly, what with freshening up of dresses, and making of wreaths. It took me a full hour this afternoon to make those wreaths of heather; and I began wondering whether it was a vanity or one's duty to let them take so much time and pains.'

'Not vanity,' said Bride; 'we know very well that nothing on earth will ever make beauties of us,' and she laughed joyously, 'least of all of me!' turning so as to have a full view of her freckled

face; 'but one would not disgust people more than needs must; and in this case it would have been very crabbed, when the Bellendens thought they had found such a moorland prize for our Scottish eyes, not to make the use of it they intended.'

'Yes,' said Fenella, hesitating; 'but whether it is too early in the year, or only English heather, or their bad gathering, it was all so short and stumpy, that when Effie told me of the plot I did feel as if they had set me to weave a rope of sand on purpose.'

'Poor Fen!' laughed Bride. 'Well, I'll make my own next time.'

'Yes, but that will be out of your time instead of mine, and just as bad. Indeed, I think I am catching you up as it is,' said Fenella, now able to compare her work with her sister's, and finding herself still one lily leaf behind.

Bride's incredulity had made Fenella doubtful, for she had great faith in Bride's judgment.

Joanna Harding had her tea-table in her mother's pretty dressing-room. It was too late for her little sisters, who were showing themselves in the drawing-room for a little while, and thence would go to bed, when the world went to dinner; and as to her brothers, no one would have proposed to them the degradation of exclusion from the dinner party.

So there were only the three girls, Joan, Clara, and Fenella, very comfortable and happy together, though their perfect ease was just a little marred by

the necessity of holding their heads upright and not tumbling their white dresses. Joan was reading when the other two entered, both arriving at the same time; and they congratulated her on being so much in advance as to be able to spend her leisure time on anything else.

'Oh yes,' she said, unfolding her work. 'You see I have done all the wreaths now except the two last lilies and the buds of the one before them; so now there is only the grounding to come, and that is as quick as it is stupid.'

'You certainly have beaten us all,' said Fenella. 'I wish ours were as forward.'

'But,' said Clara, 'is there not something odd in that stem?'

'Oh dear, I hope not; but I should not wonder, for Charlie and Herbert have been bothering worse than ever to-day.'

'How do you mean?' asked Fenella anxiously.

'Oh, I can hardly tell; but there seemed to be a dead set against me, as if they would do anything rather than leave me to work. Now it was to dawdle in the garden; then to have a game at chess —as if any rational person would play chess in the morning; then to go and see the boats come in; then Herbert sits down and draws caricatures, such abominable things, of all us six—as so many Whippety stouries first, with our necks growing on one side, working away; and then with our necks grown quite awry, kneeling on one knee presenting our cushions to the Doctor.'

'Oh, what fun!' cried Fenella; 'do let me see them.'

'No, indeed! I made away with them. They were quite wicked, I assure you, for there was Dr. Henderson in full canonicals, and a great cross down the front, holding up two fingers like a bishop in an illumination.'

'That was too bad!' cried the young ladies, but with a sort of amusement, that made Joan proceed with the greater indignation.

'It was all done up like a pre-Raphaelite drawing; we were all as stiff as pokers, but with this great crick in our necks, and each one hand up just in the same position—and oh! so horribly like—especially Bride, towering over all, with her eagle's feather; and Mary Rose looking like a little mouse at the end; and under it, "Ye Whippety Stouries, offrande ye vj Queshyons."'

'And you did not care for it?' asked Clara.

'No, indeed! I? No, I worked the more to prove I did not; and I tore up the horrid thing, and put it into the grate! Who would be hindered by mockery?'

'And,' said Fenella cautiously, 'have you heard anything of a regular scheme among the boys for preventing our work?'

'No, how?' cried Joan. 'I should not wonder. They are quite up to anything—those cousins of mine. But what? It will be some pleasure to conquer them if it is a combination.—Have you heard anything of it?' turning to Clara.

Clara shook her head. She began to see an explanation of Freddy's conduct, but she did not wish to betray it. Joan then appealed to Fenella, who, having bound them both over not to confess their knowledge to the young gentlemen, disclosed all that she had been able to learn from Effie.

Joan's delight was extreme. There was something highly flattering in being the object of a well concerted plot; and she was by no means disposed to such incredulity as Bride's, but rather to magnify the attacks, and therewith the dignity of her work, which no one, save her mother, thought nearly as important as she considered proper—nay, scarcely her mother herself. She even became reflective, moral, and philosophical, upon the subject.

'You see they talked of spiritual despotism. That's what it is. It exactly agrees with that horrible picture of Herbert's. The world is bitterly jealous of the spiritual influence, because it feels that nothing else so destroys its power. And women being more open to these higher influences than men, and thus becoming emancipated from their bondage and slavery, they become a sort of battle field, the world and the Church each endeavouring for their allegiance.'

Clara and Fenella could neither of them help laughing at this tirade.

'There is a great deal of truth in it, though,' said Joan, half laughing herself. 'Really and truly, if I were equally set upon any freak of my own—on botany or geology, say—I might be ten times more

tiresome without their minding it in the same way.'

'That is true,' said Fenella; 'and therefore I have always been told that it is best to make any sort of good work as little obnoxious as possible.'

'And I suppose you go on that principle,' said Clara.

'Bride thinks it right,' said Fenella.

'But that is like denying one's faith,' cried Joan.

'I don't know,' said Fenella. 'I think we should be stopped altogether if we made ourselves disagreeable; so we have to take care not to do that.'

'And your brothers would have nothing to do with the plot, and let you alone?' asked Clara.

'And what have yours done? O Clara, do tell us. Are they in the plot? Have they done anything to you?'

'Not Johnnie,' said Clara; 'and it is absurd to think a little fellow like Freddy could have any such thing in his head.'

'But—oh! has he really been persecuting you?' cried Joan eagerly; then bethinking herself, 'no—I won't ask you if you do not like to tell.'

'Little boys are always apt to be tiresome in the holidays, when they have nothing to do,' said Clara; 'besides, everything goes wrong with Susan away; it is much more likely to be *that* than any formed design.'

Her evident dislike to say any more about her little brother, backed by Fenella's sympathetic attempt to change the conversation, made Joan

perceive that it would be kinder to pursue the subject no further, though she was far too proud of being persecuted to understand Clara's wish not to believe that Freddy was concerned in the scheme. Clara had some misgivings in her own mind. She thought it possible that Freddy might have caught up some idle talk of the elder boys, that made him think it fine to make her work the object of his mischief; and she resolved both to guard it with double care, and to question John; but her alarm went no further. And when Lady Bellenden very kindly asked the whole Braithwayte party to join in a grand expedition to an old castle on the next Tuesday, she was delighted to hear her father give full acceptance, at least for her and her brothers, for he himself was obliged to go for a couple of days to the cathedral town on some clerical business. The prospect was all the pleasanter to Clara—both because, however she might moralize with the Roses, it was more agreeable not to be left out of everything; and also she hoped that the anticipation would put Freddy in such good humour, as to keep him out of any intolerable mischief. Indeed, going to Mortimer's Castle had been her keen desire for years past; and many and many a time had she gazed at its photograph, and wondered why no one ever *would* take her thither! She blushed with pleasure at the invitation, and could hardly repress her enjoyment. Indeed, this whole party was quite a study to Clara. It was the first sight of what she had often heard discussed by her sister and others—

the evening parties of what Mrs. West called the *élite;* and she at length was beholding Mrs. Harding's elegance and youthful appearance; Mrs. West's wonderful gorgeousness of brocade, emeralds, and gold; Lady Euphemia Maclaine's one evening dress—the silver grey poplin, in which she never failed to appear, and always looked well dressed. Clara was fond of Bride and Fenella, whom she regarded somewhat in the light of rescued brands; but there was a mutual antagonism between the curate world and the semi-Presbyterian house of Glentarn. The Maclaines went to church, and expressed no dissatisfaction, not regarding local church arrangements as the concern of mere strangers, and being no gossips; but they were those partizans of Dr. Henderson and his ways, who high-bred and grave, and kept to themselves; and were more Hendersonian than himself, viewed the tall rigid Scotswoman with a mixture of awe, dislike, and pity for her ignorance, as a sort of heathen. And little Clara, in her unobserved corner, was one of these.

Joan on the other hand was full of excitement, and determined to keep a careful watch, as she said, for symptoms. She had the better opportunity that evening, as she was the only unmusical one of the young ladies, having no voice, and so little ear, that on the departure of her governess she had been allowed to drop the attempt to keep up her practice. So she kept a heedful eye upon the assembly round the piano, where the Bellendens, Maclaines, and

Camilla, were all singing, to the great satisfaction of the assembly in general, and apparently no less to their own, for they went on so very late, that Captain Harding began to grow anxious at the wearied look that his wife could not help betraying; and Joan questioned whether it were not malice prepense on the part of the young men, to make everybody get up late in the morning, and so lose their time for their cushions. No one was more grateful to Lady Euphemia, when in her very decided manner she indicated to her daughters that it was quite too late for their father, and insisted that not another song should be attempted.

Fenella, when she thought it over on the way home, could not help feeling somewhat alarmed when she remembered that there had been much said about practising together, and learning each other's mutual stock of glees. She had been carried away by the excitement at the moment; but she foresaw that if half of what was talked of should be carried out, the chance intervals bestowed on the cushions in the day-time would be nothing; and as to the time in the morning, these late hours were making it more difficult to get up early than she had guessed it would be when the time was portioned out. Bride went to help her mother undress, and Fenella was too sleepy by the time she came back to talk to her that night. But when by force of last night's resolution, the younger sister awoke as the clock struck six, and by the same resolution, threw herself out of bed, with half-closed eyes and

stiff weary limbs, she really had not the heart to awaken Bride, who was sleeping so sweetly, with a smile parting her lips. Fenella compromised matters by making a good deal of noise in moving about the room, and presently she saw that Bride's eyes were open, and that she was dreamily and serenely contemplating the aerial waltzes of the flies.

'What, Fen!' she exclaimed, with a start; 'you don't mean that you are getting up!'

'Why not? It is half-past six.'

'Nonsense! It must be four!'

Fenella held up Bride's watch.

'Well, I'll get up in a minute or two.'

Fenella went to call Effie and Eva; but on her return, Bride still seemed in the same serene trance.

'Are you very tired?' she asked rather anxiously.

'No—oh no! Only sometimes it is pleasant to think a little.'

For Bride to lie thinking, instead of getting up, was so new an event, that Fenella faced about from the looking-glass, with all her hair on her shoulders, to look at her.

'Don't stare so!' said Bride, with a laugh. 'Leave me a little peace, and I will begin in a minute.'

The request for peace prevented Fenella from entering on the subject of the conspiracy, but she was very uneasy. It was not till she was full dressed, and had sat down to give a few minutes to her work, that Bride, suddenly bethinking herself, started up with a cry of dismay, and began to dress

with more than her usual promptitude. Then Fenella ventured again to mention the conclusion that the little council had arrived at.

'Very like Joan,' laughed the elder sister; it would delight her to think so. But it really is too ridiculous to suppose that any grown-up person would meddle with such folly.'

'And yet,' Fenella said, 'all this has been rather hindering.'

'Late hours? Oh, that was my own fault. I must make it up in the course of the day.'

'I don't see how we can, if we are to have all this learning of new music.'

'Anything can be done with a will,' said Bride, rather impatiently; then, almost as if to end the conversation, she added, 'Is it not time you should be hearing Effie's music?'

Fenella gathered up her work, and went—much bewildered. It was the first morning Bride had missed finishing her portion of the cushion before breakfast; and there was more than a day's task in arrears.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GLEES.

CAMILLA WEST sat bending her head over the frame, where her lily-worked cushion was stretched, in the shaded window of her pretty boudoir; a slanting blind keeping off sun but admitting air, and permitting a view of the glittering summer sea, enlivened by many a little white sail. Two bright little grass paroquets caressed each other in their pretty cage among the flowers in her balcony; and a toy terrier, looking as if he had been cut out of black satin, all but his delicate little legs, chest, and brows, lay just outside his wicker kennel. And within, every chair, table, couch, shelf—whatever the eye fell upon—told of the most lavish expenditure, that would have searched the world for whatever she hinted a desire to possess. Nay, some of the gossips of the town did aver that the ostrich egg in an Algerine net, which hung over the window, had actually been purchased by Mrs. West in good faith that it was the roc's egg, that somebody had told her was all that was wanting to her daughter's room; but the best informed always declared that this was a libel, though agreeing that Camilla would be all the happier if she only had something left to wish for. For there was evidently a sort of weariness and want of rest

about her life. She was never in high spirits, and was apt to look *ennuyée* when alone, and tired by variety; but she had certainly been brighter than usual over the various little difficulties that at first beset her unaccustomed hands, on beginning her work; and on the present day, whether it were caused by the occupation, or by anything else, there was a sort of smile and glow that made her almost pretty, as she used her needle rather dreamily; sometimes humming one of the last evening's songs to herself; sometimes parting her lips with an amused smile at some pleasant recollection.

Presently there was a knock at her door, and there entered Bride Maclaine, with a roll of music in her hand, and three or four little ones in her train.

'I cannot stay; but as I had to take the little ones out for their walk, I thought I would leave the Jacobite songs you said you would like to have.'

'Oh, thank you. Could not you stay and try them over with me? I am sure I could find something to amuse these little people,' said Camilla, going towards her piano.

'I am afraid I must not,' said Bride; 'they are due for their lessons; besides, I should only be interrupting your working time.'

'Oh, I don't keep to regular times, I only work just as or when I can.'

'Regular times always seem to me a sort of frame-work of life,' said Bride.

'Ah! that is because you are so steady and

decided. Now to feel myself obliged to do the same thing at the same time every day, would drive me distracted with weariness.'

'And it would distract me to feel as if I had no outlines for my day. But it is just as one happens to be constituted; it all comes to the same thing in the end.'

'I don't know,' said Camilla; 'it is you methodical people who do the most work.'

'Perhaps not,' said Bride, smiling; 'for, do you know, I missed my piece of cushion this morning out of pure laziness, and it will cost me more to redeem that time again than it would cost you, whose time is not portioned out.'

'We were very late last night,' said Camilla; 'but how delightful it was!'

A little discussion of the delights followed, before Bride again said she must be going; and Camilla proposed to take her through the garden, and lead her out by the private way to the promenade. It was a most agreeable proposal; for Falconberg stood piled up on a succession of terraces with broad stone steps leading from one to the other, and vases of flowers along the balustrades; and the little Maclaines, who considered it the most wonderful place extant, jumped for joy as they heard the offer. Bride only demurred at thus interrupting the cushion; but Camilla, laughing, and saying, 'Oh, you know I am unmethodical,' ran to fetch her hat and parasol, and her little dog leaped up delighted.

All were descending the stairs from her room, when they found the hall door in the act of opening, but they were too far advanced to retreat; and at the bottom of the stairs Walter Bellenden met them, desiring not to stop them if they were going out. It was explained that Miss West was only going to take her guests through the garden. He asked to accompany them; and out they all went together on the delicious terraces, shaded from the full glare, overhanging, as it seemed, the blue glittering bay and the town far beneath; guarded by handsome Italian looking balustrades, above which at intervals arose orange trees, vases full of trailing wreaths of exotics, and beautifully modelled statues. It was a place that in the languid charm of the height of summer seemed as if it could not be in England, and suggested Spanish cavaliers, with short manto, broad sombrero, sword, and guitar. Nay, Walter Bellenden, in wide hat, loose coat, knickerbockers, and a dainty little black moustache and pointed beard, was a ready-made hidalgo, as he well knew; and further decided that as Camilla stood—her taper waist, long, flowing, much trimmed train over her hoop, and tiny hat on her light hair, reminded one of Watteau's pictures; while the stately height and perfectly plain dark dress of Bride Maclaine, her heavy roll of ruddy gold hair, and grand simple bearing, made her look, as she stood on the broad stone step, as if she had walked out of a picture by Titian. Neither was in the least beautiful, but

each in such a scene as this was highly picturesque; and the only things not in keeping, were those three little freckled, sandy, shabby, scraggy Maclaines, whose legs looked so long, and their frocks so limp; and who were so provokingly like their sister, that it was impossible to forget that she had walked out from an establishment as unlike a Venetian palace as could well be. She was a great deal more lively and entertaining than poor little Camilla, who could not talk nearly as well as she could sing; and even there, her voice compared with Bride's was like that of a sentimental mouse trying to sing with a blackbird; but what was the use of thinking of that, when there were so many yards of sandy hair all attached to poor Glentarn? No; grand-looking and agreeable as Bride might be, it would be best to be on one's guard against constructions. Only in the war of the cushion there would be some glory in influencing so superior a damsel; and after what had passed, the younger lads would have a triumph, unless he succeeded in preventing its completion; and that defeat to his vanity Mr. Bellenden could not afford. And very agreeable he was, as the party slowly went down the steps, discussing concerts and singers. These, to him, living in London, were more familiar than bread and water, and were fairly known to Camilla; while to Bride the opportunities, scantly three or four, of hearing a celebrated vocalist or good musician, seemed to have been so much prized, and so used, as to have served as a key to her to

all that the others said. Then came the consultation about constant practising together for a course of musical parties at Lady Bellenden's; since, said Walter, it is pleasant to have an object. They, the Thetfords, and some other musical families, might easily, with a little study and practice, produce a very agreeable series of musical soirées during the next month or two; and the voices of Walter Bellenden, Miss West, Bride, and her sister, were, as already proved, so peculiarly fitted to go well together, that they already began to choose out their songs for study, and to try over scraps of them almost under their breath; hardly knowing how time went. Annie, a conscientious person, with her spelling heavy on her mind, plucked Bride's dress once or twice; but finding herself unheeded, resigned herself to skipping up and down the steps with Eva and Chrissie, to whom the holiday was only too welcome; only, now and then, singing over to herself, 'p-e-a-r, pear, a fruit; p-a-i-r, pair, a couple; *p-a-r-e*, pare, to cut off;' for fear she should forget. At last, even skipping became almost too much of a good thing, and there were whispers about dinner; Annie wondering whether it would end in their being asked to luncheon, a contingency which she regarded as only too good to be true; while Eva and Chrissie viewed it with equal dismay.

It really was the sound of a gong in an adjacent house that at last warned Bride of the hour. Much startled, yet half amused, she refused all invitations

to luncheon, but promised to talk over the singing plans with Fenella, and to come the next day to make the arrangements with Camilla; after which she gathered up her impatient followers, and made the best of the way across the parade towards home; while Camilla and Mr. Bellenden slowly mounted the steps again, Camilla eager in the praises of Miss Maclaine, whom she admired and looked up to more than to anyone else; and Walter Bellenden half agreeing, yet so as to imply that there was someone not far off, yet more to his taste than even Bride Maclaine. And Camilla understood enough not to know whether to be flattered or angered by such injustice to such superior qualities as she ascribed to her friend. Mr. West was not at home, but Mrs. West made Mr. Bellenden welcome with all the ardour of her hospitable soul; would not hear of his excuses for the long lingering in the garden; invited him to luncheon with unnecessary insistance, and was charmed beyond measure at the prospect of the musical meetings.

'Quite a little exclusive thing among the *élite*,' as she said, beaming delight out of every good-natured feature. Only she hoped Lady Bellenden would make every use of her rooms; she believed there was one more in her suite than at Sans Souci; and the practisings and rehearsals *must* be at Falconberg, in consideration of Camilla's £300 grand piano.

Then, after luncheon, the grand piano was opened

to be made aware of these shocking machinations of the young gentlemen; and so, on her way home from her morning's bath, she had knocked at the modest portal of the Turtle-nest; and had found, as usual, Mrs. Rose with her book, her pen, and work-basket, and Mary with her work spread around her low lounging wicker-chair.

'Dear Miss Harding, this *is* kind!' was the mother's reception.

'I don't often come out in the morning, I am too busy,' said Joan, with dignity; 'but I thought you ought to know it.'

'Oh, what?' asked Mary. 'I hope Mrs. Henderson is not coming home sooner.'

'Let us hear, dear Miss Harding,' added Mrs. Rose. 'Those who have passed through the waters, like myself, stand prepared to meet any blow!'

'It is no blow,' said Joan. 'Oh no; only some nonsense of the boys—those cousins and some of my brothers—everyone, in fact, except Miles. They have all taken offence about these cushions, it seems; and the other day, they all, Bellendens and Braithwaytes, and I think the Maclaines, made a solemn vow to one another that they would obstruct, hinder, and prevent all spiritual influence and priestly despotism, as they called it, by every means in their power; and begin by preventing us from working our six cushions.'

'How dreadful!' exclaimed Mary.

'Ah! my child,' said Mrs. Rose, 'long may you remain ignorant of the recesses of human depravity.'

'I see!' cried Mary; 'that was what I told you, Mamma dear, about that little Freddy Braithwayte, and the tricks he was playing with his sister's work. Think of that—and a clergyman's son!'

'Ah! what, what?' exclaimed Joan. 'We could not get Clara to believe in the plot, or confess to her brothers being in it. And she is actually going to the pic-nic at Mortimer's Castle.'

'After all she said about fashionable dissipation!' cried Mary.

'Ah! let no one triumph till the temptation is over,' gently sighed Mrs. Rose. 'Poor child!'

'But what did you say she was letting that horrid Johnny do to her work?' said Joan. 'I never could bear either of those boys.'

'Their sisters are laying up a store of grief,' said Mrs. Rose; and then Mary gave full particulars of the scene she had witnessed, not to say fuller than full. The virtuous indignation was extreme. 'No wonder about the Maclaines,' it was on all hands agreed; 'they were Scotch, and *of course* were hostile to the Church; but that the Braithwayte boys should have allowed themselves to be corrupted, was a token of the dreadful effects of clergymen permitting their sons to become contaminated by the world.' Joanna did not mind what was said, so long as it tended to the exceptional exaltation of her dear Miles; and Mrs. Rose could not congratulate herself sufficiently that she had no son, but only one dear little daughter. Clara was greatly pitied for her blindness; and when Joan averred that the same

want of perception extended to Bride and Camilla, very little doubt was felt that, as Mrs. Rose said, 'those only who understood self-denial would be found to persevere in the time of temptation;' and that dear Miss Harding's steady fortitude would have its reward. 'It was plain,' said Mrs. Rose, 'that it had been right from the first to refuse all solicitations to gaiety; and, at the risk of offending the worldly-wise, to give up everything for the sake of the task, that was sure to be blessed to them. Those who had yielded ever so little for expediency's sake, were now, they saw, blinded to the specious efforts of the enemy. And thus humility—shown in such different stations—in the lofty and the lowly position, would at last shine out conspicuous, when worldliness would have a fall.'

She kissed Joan, with a very soft warm kiss, as the sharer of her daughter's triumph; and Joan took her leave, thinking what a very nice wise person Mrs. Rose was; what a shame it was in those idle brothers to laugh at her; and feeling for her own part, like all manner of virtuous and devout heroines in one, persecuted by this wicked and fashionable world.

And Mary sat at home, and felt even more like the humble, meek, and unworldly widow's child, proof against all the allurements of fashion; and wondering in what manner these deluding tempters were going to assail her and her cushion. Indeed, as the morning passed by, she could not help feeling it rather provoking, that Joan should meet with jeers

and mockery; Clara have her work torn from her by sheer force; the other three be subjected to the blandishments of fashionable puppies; while she herself—so much better prepared, and invulnerable in her meekness and humility, should not even be assaulted. But of course the assault was coming, and she would be armed at all points.

There was at about four o'clock, a hasty scampering of feet; then a ring; then an announcement of 'Master Braithwayte;' and in rushed the enemy in the person of John, hot, excited, breathless, hair wild—

'Oh!' he panted out, as he gave the hottest and reddest of paws; 'we thought you did not know, but they are all in the bay. The flannel sheet—I mean the Channel Fleet, and the French one—such a jolly lot, and now's your time! Won't you come?'

'Thank you,' said Mary, with the utmost frigid contempt, 'but I am forewarned.'

'Forewarned! I did not know you knew anyone in the fleet! But come along. Don't you want to see it all the more?'

'Not in comparison with my fixed duty,' said Mary.

Johnny stared. 'What, do you mean to say that you like that old work better than the fleet? The two fleets—I say—you'll never see a jollier sight; unless it was the English pitching into the French!'

'I do mean it,' said Mary, with a turn of her gentle eyes.

'O my! Why, even Clara's out on the rocks.'

'I am sorry—'

'And give me leave to say, Master John,' added Mrs. Rose, 'if the poor widow of a departed angel may be allowed to give a hint in right of old friendship—it grieves me to see your father's son engaged in the endeavour to lead away his sister and her friends from a duty to the Church.'

'Well, good-bye,' quoth Johnny sulkily, and bolted out of the reach of any further good counsel; muttering to himself, 'Catch me ever coming to tell her anything again!'

'Ah!' sighed Mrs. Rose. 'I have done my best for my old friend's son; but his ears are deafened to good counsel. Poor Mr. Braithwayte; I pity him.'

'Is it not shocking, Mamma,' said Mary, 'that those boys should allow themselves in such deceits? But I think Johnny saw that I saw through his plan of inveigling me down to see nothing, and waste my time.'

'And he will respect you the more, darling child! Even the world honours resistance to its dictates, even while it is most bitter! Its very persecution is an honourable distinction.'

CHAPTER XIII.

BRIDE'S BACKSLIDING.

It was not till the two fleets had disappeared, that Bride and Fenella, who had been running about all the afternoon with different detachments of excited children, met in their own room, for a hasty preparation for dinner; when Bride communicated the arrangement for a course of music.

Fenella looked doubtful, and with a half-despairing sigh, said—

'Do you think we can possibly find time?'

'Time may be found for everything,' said Bride.

'Not quite,' said Fenella; 'you know we had to leave off some things to make time for the cushions.'

'The cushions will not go on for ever,' said Bride, a little impatiently.

'No; and if this singing scheme could wait till afterwards—'

'But it won't; it must be while the Bellendens are here! Only think what it would be, if Mrs. West were the leading person, instead of Lady Bellenden.'

'I know,' said Fenella; 'but how can we possibly give the time? now, too, in the holidays. We can work while we keep the children in sight, and out of mischief; but if we were singing, and in a strange house, they would deave the place with their antics.'

'Effie ought to begin to be useful.'

'But she is not; she is either buried in a book, or she makes the laddies worse, because they don't choose for her to find fault with them.'

'It would be a great pity to give it up. It would be such an opportunity of cultivating our music a little; and there is nothing Papa enjoys so much. Besides, we might meet for our practices in the evenings, when the bairns are disposed of.'

'Ah! but then we should be kept up late, and we could do no good in the day if that often happened. All this running about has waked me now; but this morning I was so sleepy, I could hardly tell what I was doing. I prompted Angus in his Greek verb with two lines of Auld Lang Syne; I went quite to sleep over Eva's French reading; and I made a mistake in my crossing.'

'Poor Fen! I was not there to help. You are tired to death, and everything seems a difficulty.'

'Yes,' said Fenella; 'and that is why I think it cannot be; one would do nothing properly if one always went on so.'

'Well, Fen, you shall not be deserted again; I did not mean to have dawdled this morning; but you see there were all the arrangements to make.'

'If it were not for the cushions,' said Fenella wistfully; feeling as if she could not be right when thinking differently from Bride.

'And you know, dear, we resolved that those cushions should never interfere with any duty of being agreeable and pleasant in our family.'

'Yes; but I don't know who wants us to do this,' said Fenella indifferently.

'Fen!' cried Bride indignantly; and then stopped short, presently adding, in a different tone, 'You *know* how Papa would enjoy it; and Mamma wants us to get on with our music.'

'Have you asked Mamma?'

'No, I made no doubt of her liking it; and you know she has always said she had no time, and trusted to us about our little engagements.'

'That is just why I should like to ask her,' said Fenella, so wearily, that Bride came and kissed her, saying, 'You are quite overdone, little Fen; it is all the getting up so early about those cushions.'

'Really,' said Fenella, half laughing, 'one would think you had joined the plot against the poor cushions.'

'The plot! What, have you that nonsense still in your head?'

'So much, that I almost fancy this plan for the glee-singing must be part of the scheme.'

'That is a mere figment of your sleepy brains,' said Bride; 'don't you think they are turning to wool and silk?'

'Maybe,' said Fenella, laughing wearily; 'but all that is left of them thinks that we ought to be sure that Mamma wishes for us to get into this musical partnership before we involve ourselves. Indeed, if I were not so sleepy, I should say, I would not for my own self; but I don't know whether it is only sleepiness.'

'Of course it is,' said Bride; 'you will see it very differently to-morrow; or even when you have had your dinner.'

Nevertheless, Fenella's strong advice, sleepy as it was, had so much effect upon Bride, that she decided on consulting her mother. The needs of the large family and weakly father, had made Lady Euphemia early convert her eldest daughter into an almost irresponsible prime minister; and, allowing for a few differences of sentiment and sympathy in a grown-up independent character, she had such perfect trust in Bride's soundness of principle and judgment, as to leave her much to her own guidance, even where opinions and tastes might not be in the same mould.

Thus it had been with the cushions, and the whole period of thought and teaching, of which they had been the visible token. Kirk and Church had been so alternate with the Scottish lady, that she had no personal likings for the school of doctrine to which Dr. Henderson belonged; but she saw her girls becoming far more really interested in religious subjects than ever before, and was willing it should be in the manner that suited them; and she shut her eyes and ears to details that were distasteful to her prejudices; partly because she knew herself to be too busy to think them out, and to give a candid judgment.

Bride had expected that it would be the same with the music; indeed, she knew that she could easily make it so, by a sort of casual observation

that they were going to get up some glees; but Fenella's objections were so unusual, that they worked on her so far as to make her perceive that she herself was vehemently set on the music meetings; so vehemently, that possibly she was no fair judge, for they would be wonderfully pleasant and enticing, witness her unprecedented idling of the morning. So she resolved that the question should be laid before her mother in its fullness; even though she knew that the way in which she had spent the morning lessened her chances of a favourable answer; that is, if it had been observed; and it was well known in the family that what was supposed to have been entirely unnoticed always turned out to be perfectly known to Mamma. That evening the family were alone; it was very warm, and after dinner there was a sitting out in the twilight, during which Bride was able to come up to her mother and say—

'Mamma, can I speak to you?'

Lady Euphemia intimated her readiness; but she was never a very tender person; and though Bride was less afraid of her than was any other of her children, even she felt it no easy matter to begin.

'Mamma, I wished to ask your leave—that is, Fenella thought I ought. Lady Bellenden, and Mrs. West, and some others, want to get up a little series of musical parties; and there is a notion that the Thetfords, and Camilla, and the Bellendens, and ourselves, should practise some things regularly for it; if you had no objection.'

'What,' said Lady Euphemia, in no promising tone, 'a series of amateur concerts?'

'Only among ourselves, Mother,' said Bride, feeling the structure crumbling.

'Any way, Bride, I cannot allow it. It is one thing to sing when you are asked at an evening party, and quite another to be making it a habit to practise with any idle young men who may happen to be lounging here with nothing to do.'

Bride was astounded, and did not answer; she was blushing crimson, but the twilight was a veil that her mother did not apparently try to penetrate; and after a moment's pause, she continued, 'You have no proper time to devote to music, in the way that would be necessary if you made it an object; unless, indeed, this morning is to become a precedent.'

'Oh no, Mamma; indeed, I am very sorry for my idling then.'

'I knew you would be,' said Lady Euphemia, with volumes of confidence in the sound.

'And Fenella said that we had no time.'

'Poor Fenella! She is a good lassie, and she has been hard worked to-day,' said the mother, in a tenderer tone than she might have used to Fenella's self.

'That she has! I know I have used her very ill, and she has been so steady and patient and persevering,' said Bride, with a strong disposition to a rush of tears, though she knew not why.

'And it will make it the easier for you to recover yourself, Bride,' said Lady Euphemia; 'you have

been a little off the balance with your amusements and undertakings, but you will get a hand over yourself again, now you have set your will to it.'

'I hope so,' said Bride, more ruefully than resolutely; but her mother believed in the resolution, and would not notice the ruefulness. 'What shall I say?' she added; 'shall I say that I cannot find time for so much practising?'

'Say that *I* do not wish you to undertake so much,' returned Lady Euphemia; 'being sure that you cannot perform it consistently with your duties at home, or your prior engagements. That will be answer enough for anyone.'

Bride thought so, indeed. She made no further remonstrance; but when at the next turn her mother went in-doors, she remained wandering and thinking restlessly; now feeling impatient, oppressed, unjustly treated, and keenly aggravated by those words—'Any idle young man who may be lounging about the place;' now terrified and distressed to find herself in so rebellious a mood of finding fault with her mother—certain, from old force of habit, that in all practical matters Mamma must be right and she wrong; resolute not again to fail in any of her undertakings, and not to leave on her mind its present uncomfortable sense of omission. As to the lapse in the work, that should be made up for as fast as possible. Bride had always intended this; and in the present state of her mind, nothing else could have satisfied her. So no sooner did bed-time come, than, while the thoroughly weary Fenella, too much

tired to utter an unnecessary word, plunged into well earned slumbers, Bride, who had previously secured the longest bed-room candle, sat down with the resolution not to rest till she had brought her work up once more to be even with her sister's. If she had been more fatigued, she would have still made and kept the same resolution; but, in fact, she was too much excited, too restless and distressed, to endure the notion of going to bed or to sleep. In fact, though her strong will chained her eyes to her work, and made her fingers move quickly and steadily, it was all she could do to keep herself from letting her work hang down in the same lingering dream in which she had let herself fall behindhand, even in her working hours, during the last week. But she soon found herself really forced to attend by the exigencies of the case, almost to the exclusion of fixed thought; for after Fenella's candle had been put out, the light was scarcely sufficient for the dark part of the leaf that was next to be done; and the wools having been sorted with a view only to being used in the long summer daylight, the selection was rather puzzling—for which, perhaps, she was not sorry, though the dimness made her eyes begin to water; and the effort was an absolute solace to vague roaming thoughts between discontent with herself and with the rest of the world.

The family was, however, not one in which it was easy to keep any extraordinary hours. Asthma was one of Mr. Maclaine's most constant torments; and both he and his wife were used to wakeful nights.

It had struck one when Bride heard a step gliding up-stairs, and startled by the abiding terror of the household, she opened her door softly, and seeing her mother, she asked in a low whisper, 'Nothing wrong with Papa!'

Lady Euphemia made a re-assuring gesture, saying, 'So it is you! I told Papa I thought so, when he was sure someone was up and about.'

'I thought I made no noise at all. Fenella was quite sound asleep!'

'He says he always feels rather than hears when anyone is up.'

'Then I will go to bed at once,' said Bride, not able to help looking greatly disappointed; 'I am so sorry to have disturbed him!'

'Even without that, my dear, I could not allow this.'

'I am not up so late as at a ball either,' sighed Bride; 'and I was trying to do what I had left undone.'

'I know,' said Lady Euphemia, much more tenderly. 'Bride, my dear, I *do* feel for you. I know very well that when one has slackened the reins for a time, some outrageous exertion seems to be exactly the way to appease one's conscience, and get up one's self-complacency again. Only, my dear, it is much better that the lost ground should be regained by small steps than by a great bound.'

'I suppose it must be so, Mamma;' and the moisture in the eyes ran into two great genuine tears, as the words were meekly said.

Lady Euphemia put her arm round the girl's neck, and kissed her more tenderly than Bride ever remembered to have been kissed.

'Good night, my very dear child, and God bless you,' she said.

There was a great deal more in Bride's mind and in Lady Euphemia's than either would have expressed even at a more convenient season.

The next morning all the family were wondering what was the matter with Bride's eyes. Bride quietly said she had sat up too late, trying to work; and in a low voice she added—

'Mamma, you were quite right—all I did last night was wrong; colours, crossing, and all!'

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SIEGE OF GLENTARN.

'If you please, Mrs. and Miss West are in the drawing-room; and my Lady would be glad if one of you young ladies would go down to them, because she is engaged with Dr. Sims.'

It was only half-past eleven. Lady Euphemia, though never choosing to deny that she was at home, had pretty well broken in her neighbours to remember that she was 'engaged' in the forenoon, and to be afraid of encountering her cold haughty

manner; and this morning she was specially engaged by the physician's visit, both to her husband and to hold a consultation about the health and education of the delicate little Nial.

'I had better go,' said Fenella; 'you have *such* a head-ache, Bride.'

'As I brought this upon us, it is fair that I should face it; I don't suppose Mamma will be able to come in for some time; and if I can settle it before she comes, it will be all the better.'

'True,' said Fenella; 'their coming so early, too! she will be all the more vexed with them! But your head, Bride—unless, to be sure, it is better out of the noise of the school-room.'

It might be so, for Eva was practising and counting aloud; Annie was saying verbs; Effie had been till this moment battling out her German translation; Angus preparing his Virgil *vivâ voce;* and Bride had, almost for the first time in her life, *heard* it all with every fibre of her ears. And yet she almost preferred the din to what she was going to do! And her brave spirit quailed the more as she beheld, not only Mrs. West and Camilla, but Walter and Herbert Bellenden.

'A thousand excuses, dear Miss Maclaine; I know Lady Euphemia is always so occupied in the morning; but just this once, on such a matter—' said Mrs. West.

'My mother is sorry she is occupied,' said Bride, almost as stiffly as Lady Euphemia herself could have spoken before luncheon; 'but Dr. Sims is

here, and I do not think she will be able to come down just yet.'

There were profuse hopes that Mr. Maclaine was not more unwell; and Bride having briefly disposed of that matter, the musical scheme with all its fresh developments began to be poured forth; but Bride resolutely interrupted—

'I am afraid I misled you yesterday. When I came to talk it over with my mother, she did not think it practicable.'

'Indeed, my dear Miss Maclaine, I am so sorry; perhaps she did not understand that it would be quite private—quite exclusive—only the *élite*.'

'She thinks,' said Bride, 'that we have too much to do for us to be able to undertake so much practice and preparation; and I know we could not properly.'

'Nay, nay,' said Walter Bellenden; 'we have been too alarming. It need not be a regular formal matter at all—only a few practices now and then in preparation for an evening—nothing defined.'

'No, nothing defined; only meetings for young people,' interposed Mrs. West; 'just a way of bringing them together pleasantly at the best houses. Young people always ought to meet.'

There had been something in Walter's tone that jarred upon Bride, and made it easier to her to answer Mrs. West.

'Thank you. You are very kind, but we are a large party in ourselves; there is a good deal to do, and my sister and I both feel that we could not undertake any more.'

'Except the cushions?' said Walter, with a significant look.

'Well,' said Bride, rallying her spirits to defend the breach; 'having undertaken one thing, is a reason against undertaking another.'

'And,' said Camilla, leaning forward, and speaking in a tone of suppressed eagerness, 'we shall have more time; Dr. and Mrs. Henderson are not coming home for three weeks more, and the Consecration is put off.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Bride, with a sense of relief, as she thought of the negative quantity, not yet removed; but then becoming persuaded that it was too good to be true, she added, 'Did the Braithwaytes say so?'

'We did not hear it from the Braithwaytes,' said Mrs. West, 'but from quite equally good authority. Camilla is always so kind to poor Mrs. Rose and her daughter; she went in to see them, and they knew it as a fact.'

Bride, in the meantime, recollected that her mother's objections had a more deeply rooted basis than the cushions; and she said, 'Even then, I am afraid the music is out of the question for us. Mamma wished me to say so.'

'If I could only see Lady Euphemia! Don't you think she could be brought round?' said Mrs. West, looking from Walter to Bride.

It gave Bride the feeling of being asked to join a plot against her mother's judgment; and she held up her head, saying with cold dignity, 'My mother

is occupied this morning; but I quite agree with her, I see that the project would be quite impossible.'

Mrs. West here obtained her rather rash wish of trying her powers upon Lady Euphemia; for that lady entered with her husband. Mr. Maclaine began to talk to Walter about the fleet; and Bride could easily guess at Mrs. West's hearty arguments about young people meeting, and parties confined to the *élite*, and of her mother's frigidly courteous replies about her daughter's want of time, &c., though she herself was glad to go and stand in the window, and lose the sounds in a conversation with Camilla in undertones.

'Then it really cannot be?' said Camilla, rather ruefully.

'I do not see why it should not with you,' said Bride, with an odd sort of pang of jealousy, coupled with her habitual exultation in having the wisest and strictest of mothers.

'No,' said Camilla humbly, 'the music would be worth nothing without you two, and Mamma was so much pleased. But,' lowering her voice, 'please tell me—is it only that you have so little time, or does Lady Euphemia not approve—think it not the thing?'

'She did not like it for us,' said Bride shortly, anxious to tell the truth, but afraid of any assumption that other mothers might be less particular.

Camilla gave half a sigh.

'There will be an end of it, then,' said she, taking leave of a scheme that had looked brighter than usual in the grey haze of her tone of mind.

'I was very foolish not to see that it must be so when it was first talked of,' said Bride candidly; 'but your enchanted ground put everything out of my head, time and all; and now I am paying for it, for I am dreadfully behindhand.'

'That won't signify, if the Hendersons do not come home.'

'I would not trust to that,' said Bride, 'unless I had heard it from Clara; or even otherwise, our engagement was to finish the work in six weeks, and I shall not feel satisfied unless I do so.'

By this time Lady Euphemia's forenoon demeanour had repressed good-humoured Mrs. West into feeling that she must take her leave. The Bellenden brothers did not go with her; and as the door closed, Walter exclaimed with a shrug of his shoulders—'Ah! I knew she would *do* for us all! I joined her to do my best to mitigate her! Believe me,' turning to Lady Euphemia, 'it was in an unguarded moment that I spoke before her of sometimes getting up our glees together beforehand; and she has gone and turned it into a programme of amateur concerts for all the *élite*.'

'I do not see the difference,' said Lady Euphemia coldly.

'I should like to show you the difference,' said Walter, 'if,' looking at Bride, 'you could spare half an hour for the Sands of Dee.'

'Bride cannot well do so,' said Lady Euphemia; 'she has school-room affairs to attend to.'

'Will you walk down with me to see the boats

come in?' added Mr. Maclaine; and there was no refusing, though Walter felt he was being walked off. He contrived, however, to linger enough to exchange these few words with Bride.

'Is there no hope?'

'None at all; it is quite impossible.'

'Ah! Is everything to be smothered by those intolerable cushions?'

'This is quite independent of the cushions.'

'I shall never believe that! They have been the bane of my stay—made Sans Souci into Souci. But I shall see you at Mortimer's Castle, on Tuesday, and perhaps we can arrange something. Hearts may melt, though cushions may not.'

Bride retreated, more than half displeased, and rejoicing that by this time her mother had finished a short dialogue with her father, and that he was ready to carry off the guest.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BLUE BALL.

'WHAT, Joan, do I see you!' exclaimed Fenella, as she tucked up her riding-skirt, and the various carriage-loads discharged themselves at the foot of the slope that led up to Mortimer's Castle.

'Yes,' said Joan, with the face of a martyr.

'Mamma said, as it was our own party, I could not well stay at home; and I do not mind it so much, as there is three weeks more time.'

'Are you sure that the three weeks is not a snare?' asked Fenella merrily. 'Part of the conspiracy?'

'*I* don't believe in the three weeks,' said Clara, who with her brothers had just dismounted from a basket-carriage, much imperilled by Freddy's desire to act as driver. 'Papa or I should have heard of it, if it had been so.'

'I am quite sure of it,' reiterated Joan, 'for Mary Rose told me, and she heard it from her maid, whose brother is the man that *does* the Rectory garden! You don't think he could have been suborned by the conspirators! Do examine him or Mary Rose.'

'Oh, I shall not go near Mary just yet,' said Clara; 'she is sure to think it such a dreadful fall in us to be come out to-day. You heard how she treated Johnnie about the fleet. She thought it was all a trick, and drove him off with, as he said, a humbugging lecture on seducing people from their duty.'

Fenella and Joanna laughed heartily; and Clara continued—'And after all, Joan, do you think her work gets on?'

'I am sure she is much behind me,' said Joan. 'All my lilies are done except one, and a great deal of the ground.'

'I can't think what she does,' added Clara; 'she sits with her work in her lap, and thinks it does itself, I believe.'

'Mrs. Rose says it is the hare and the tortoise,' said Joan.

'Or the mock-turtle,' said Clara.

Just then the great open car came up, which was so constantly hired to convey the Maclaine family that it was commonly known as the Glentarn coach, and which now contained Lady Euphemia and some seven young people, Fenella having ridden with her father.

'Where's Bride!' was the exclamation of both Joan and Clara.

'She asked Mamma to take Annie instead of her,' said Fenella. 'In fact, she had been overtired one morning, and then trying to make up for it at night, she got all her colours wrong, in the great bluish leaf; and she found that, run after time as she would on Saturday and Monday, there was no catching up her lost piece, so she begged to stay at home and get on with it.'

'Sacrifice is necessary sooner or later,' said Joan, as Fenella ran up to assist in lifting out the smaller fry. 'I believe Bride was very nearly taken in by the conspiracy, because she would not believe in it.'

'My private belief, Joan,' said Clara, 'is that there is not a chance of either Mary's or Camilla's work being done in time, even if these three weeks you talk of were true, and were six!'

Clara's belief had been rather loudly expressed, considering that it was private; and Alice Coxe's jay's wing instantly flashed in her face with the

query, 'Oh, is anyone tired of the work? If I might do but half a cushion!'

'You had better try Miss West,' said Clara, a little impatiently; and with the exclamation, 'Oh! where is Miss West?' Alice turned away, gazing everywhere with her black beady eyes.

'How could you, Clara?' said Joan. 'Camilla will not like it at all, to have that child offering to take her work off her hands.'

'It will be a fair reproof to her,' said Clara; 'the Roses say they can't understand how she can go on in such a way with Mr. Bellenden.'

'But, Clara,' said Joan, 'if you believe what the Roses say about Walter, why won't you believe about the Hendersons coming home!'

'I forgot he was your cousin,' said Clara, blushing up to the ears.

'That makes no difference,' said Joanna, with dignity; 'I have no opinion of my cousin Walter; I think he is an empty fashionable young man, without reverence of any description. I only should be sorry for Camilla, for I think she is born for better things. But Mamma will want me to help set out the dinner.'

'And I must see what Freddy is after,' said Clara.

The Castle was just ruin enough to afford a good object for pic-nics. There was a picturesque gable and chimney covered with ivy, for sketchers; a staircase and gallery not too dangerous, a smooth shady space for dining; and even a level lawn, for

those to whom croquet was a necessary of life. But Clara did not look at it with the delight befitting the realization of a wish of many years. She had that feeling that follows on the having spoken self-sufficiently, and harshly of our neighbour—not yet repentance, but discomfort, which in its outward effect is often much more like temper. It was some excuse that Clara was more overdone than she knew; Susan's occupations pressed heavily on her, and Freddy had only grown more and more troublesome, shewing a spirit of opposition that made him disobey her merely for the pleasure of disobeying. She had so often threatened him with telling his father, that she seriously doubted whether truth to her own word did not require her to fulfil the threat; and she was most unwilling to do this, as well for Papa's sake as for Freddy's, and likewise as well knowing that any great explosion would be set down by Susan to her cruelty and mismanagement. She had the worn harassed feeling of a person unequal to her post; and moreover, Freddy's hostility to her work was so perpetual, that she never durst touch it before him save when protected by her father's presence; and she was further haunted by consternation at having, the last thing that morning, missed out of her basket a large ball of blue wool, the absence of which was unaccountable to her, as she had not taken out her work till after Freddy was gone to bed, and had kept it in her own room till morning. She had had no time for a hunt, and had not ventured to interrogate Fred, knowing that

whether he had taken it or not, she should merely expose herself to his enjoyment of her discomfiture, and have it trumpeted forth among all the other conspirators. Uneasiness had thus made her speak ill-naturedly; and she was a little alarmed when she saw Alice Coxe step pertly up to Camilla, who was sitting rather forlorn upon the lowest step of the broken staircase, and no doubt offer to take her cushion off her hands. Had she been near enough, she would have heard Camilla's very gentle answer —'Thank you, Alice; if I find I cannot do it, I may be much obliged to you; but I trust to being able to finish it myself.'

'Oh, I thought—' and Alice stopped short.

'Thought what?' asked Camilla.

'That you were so immersed in gaiety,' said little Alice.

'Scarcely that,' said Camilla meekly. 'I am glad I have one thing left to do.'

Her drooping patient manner was utterly incomprehensible to the Jay, who darted off and left her in peace. The Maclaines had always seemed to poor little Camilla to be wisdom and excellence personified. Aware that her mother was too new to their present position to be at home in it, Camilla had always looked to the Glentarn family for example; and Bride's few words, as well as Lady Euphemia's tone, had left her with an uncomfortable doubt whether the musical scheme in which Walter Bellenden played so great a part had been altogether maidenly, or at any rate lady-like. She had per-

suaded her mother entirely out of it, but the doubt and the pain did not end there; and, never a very entertaining person, the poor child now had a stiffness, shyness, and hesitation of manner, that took away all the agreeableness she ever possessed. Walter Bellenden was bored with her mother, tired of her, and very sullen at finding Bride absent. 'Had that old Highland hag shut her up at home?' he muttered to his brother, as he wandered off with a cigar to the further side of the ruin.

The various moods of discomfort were, however, a good deal appeased by the summons to the eatables, when Captain Harding's great good-humour and hospitality, and the very sweet looks and voice of his wife, made everything go on smoothly and merrily. Afterwards Captain Harding organized the inevitable croquet, for an octave of the elder young people, but it did not include the lesser children, nor Fenella and Clara, whose minds were both on sketching bent, and who established themselves in the shade of a wall in full view of the ivy-mantled tower.

Clara all the time was cogitating on her blue ball, with a great mind to consult Fenella, only she did not like to expose what she thought possible in Freddy. She was not mistaken. Freddy had, it may be remembered, understood the intended persecution of the cushion-workers much more seriously than the originators intended, and he had looked to this first general gathering as an opportunity of showing what he could do for the

honour of the family. The blue ball was burning in his pocket—burning with the desire to show his triumph to the heads of the conspiracy.

Walter Bellenden was much too great and unapproachable a person; but his brother Herbert, and Charles Harding, were some degrees nearer. They had been left out of the croquet game, and were in consequence loitering about, voting the affair 'slow,' and quite above the hearty game at hide-and-seek, in which Johnny Braithwayte, and the lesser Hardings, Coxes, and Maclaines, were engaged.

Freddy was nominally in the game, but much more intent on exhibiting his prowess. He way-laid the two lads, as they were about to light their pipes, and held up the ball, not venturing to speak, but with a certain shy pride.

'Well, young shaver, what do you stand gaping there for?' was the notice he at last received.

'To show you this!'

'This—have you just brought it from the moon?'

'No, his grandmother knits his stockings with it.'

'No,' said the indignant Freddy, 'it is what *I* have done.'

'What, spun it and wound it? Oh, the precocious infant!'

'No, no. It is what we settled. (Magnificent We!) We were to hinder those girls' cushions every way we could, you know, and this is what *I*'ve done. My sister locks her work up very close all day, but I've been even with her. I got into her

room this morning—I shammed being late, you know—got shut out at prayers, and got into her room and carried off her dear ball.'

'You horrid little low sneak!' said Herbert Bellenden carelessly, as he moved on, emitting a cloud of smoke. 'Don't I wish your sister may give it to you well?'

'Just like him!' added Charles Harding; and the two youths moved on in scornful ease, leaving the unfortunate Freddy unable to devour his fury.

Ten minutes after, Alice Coxe, who always seemed to see everything and be everywhere, popped her head into the little court where the sketchers sat, with her mallet over her shoulder, and said, 'I think your brothers are in some mischief with a ball. I went to look whether Kate and Willie were all right, and there were Nial and Freddy scrambling about where that bit of building is going on, and playing with what looked to me very like a ball of the church blue.' And Alice flitted back to her game, while Clara at first exclaimed, 'My ball!' then, 'I wonder if it is true, or only a maggot of that girl's. I wish I did not dislike her so.'

'We must go and see,' said Fenella, catching up her hat. Clara took up hers, but without putting it on, and they ran together round an angle of the wall to a place where there were preparations for building a barn in the rear—some stone and lime, and a great white lake of mortar prepared, but no masons at present at work. Sure enough, Fred and Nial were

playing at ball with the blue wool, from the opposite sides of the white pool, and an indentation therein looked suspicious. Each sister called aloud—Nial was tame directly. Would that the ball had been on his side! But it was in Freddy's hand by the time Clara had called, 'Fred, O Fred, give it back. This is too bad. I must speak to Papa.'

Not he—it only went into his pocket, and he capered wildly. But on the other hand, he could hardly escape from her; he was between the lake of mortar and the corner of the wall, a heap of lime behind him, and so narrow a space before, that she and Fenella could easily seize him; and he was child enough to be brought to yield the ball to their united strength, especially as Fenella was tall, large, and resolute on occasion. Perhaps, however, she would have parleyed, but Clara was far too desperate not to rush to the rescue of her wool. She darted forward, calling out, 'Fenella, don't let him pass!' He was going to attempt flight across the white sea, but a shriek from both girls warned him that he would sink—it would burn. Clara was close on him, would have seized him in another second, when grasping both his hands full of the unslaked lime behind him, he dashed the whole into her face and eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

'MY CUSHION! OH MY CUSHION!'

NEVER did Fenella Maclaine forget the horror and bewilderment of that moment. No one present was so well aware what a frightful thing had been done. Clara's first cry was only what it would have been had she been suddenly assailed by a blinding handful of sand or dust, and Freddy was merely bent on making his escape. No one withstood him. Clara at once had her hands up to her face, and Fenella springing to her side, cried, 'Oh, don't, don't, Clara dear, don't rub it in! You'll only make it far worse. —Nial, run for Mamma; Mamma will know what to do.—Oh, wait—don't rub, Clara.'

Without speaking, Clara gave a low but terrible cry of suffering; the hands she had tried to put down were raised again, and a fierce rub given to each eye, scarcely consciously perhaps, but causing an intolerable smart, that made her dance with anguish beyond control; and when her friend grasped her, as much to lead her out of this dangerous place as to hold down her hands, she fought and struggled so madly that Fenella was obliged to exert her strength to prevent herself from being dragged down and from rolling in the treacherous white lake of mortar; nor was it possible to hinder another of those agonizing rubs of the

streaming burning eyes, as soon as one hand was wrested loose from her hold.

'Dear Clara, indeed it is dreadful,' said Fenella; 'you can't help it, but it makes it worse! If you would only let me hold your hands!'

'I can't, I can't—if you knew!' gasped the poor girl, with a frenzied struggle—'it is like fire!'

'Yes, yes; but only don't rub the lime in—it makes it burn more. Oh! if Mamma would but come!' as she felt how hard it was to keep hold of the sufferer, although happily she herself was the taller and stronger of the two.

'Was it lime?' asked Clara, with a relaxation that betokened a lucid moment. 'Oh then, let me alone, it is all no use! And this smarting!' she shrieked with an indescribably agonized sound, renewing the effort so that Fenella had hardly resolution of heart or body to withstand her.

'Mamma is coming—Mamma will know how to help you,' she continued to insist. 'Ah, here she is! Now it will be better!'

The same confidence almost passed to poor Clara, though her ears alone told her that the whole party of parents, some six or eight in number, were approaching. Lady Euphemia and Captain Harding were outstripping the rest, and the younger people crowding frightened together far in the rear.

Lady Euphemia took the command at once, and her quiet resolute voice seemed to take away any notion of resistance. She laid her hand on Clara's shoulder—and even in the intense suffering, the girl

was sensible of the motherly tenderness of the touch —and as she looked into the fiery crimson colour of the face, and of the swelling tightly-closed eyelids, she said, 'She must go home directly. I will take her, if someone will lend a close carriage.'

'I will, I will, at once,' said Mrs. West, pushing forward; 'poor dear! Or had not one of our men better ride on and summon a medical man?'

'To take her home will be more quick,' returned the lady. 'Thank you—one of my sons—yes, you Malcolm, run to the yard and find Mrs. West's carriage.—And now, my dear, let us try what we can do for you at once; only let me lead you to the grass.'

Her supporting arm tenderly around the poor child, her hand just slightly pressing the trembling wrists that some instinctive impulse might not raise them unawares, she brought Clara back to the soft greensward, and there desired Fenella to fetch her camel's-hair brushes. No one tried to interfere; Lady Euphemia was rather feared by most people, and all were conscious of being completely at a loss in a case like the present, so that only Captain Harding, Mr. Maclaine, Fenella, and the irrepressible Alice Coxe—the latter, however, with a face streaming with tears—came very near. Johnny, in great grief and horror, had been detained by gentle Mrs. Harding, and advised not to go too near, lest he should distress or startle his sister.

The object was to remove as much of the lime as might be practicable; but for Clara to open her eyes

seemed impossible, the muscles would not obey her mental will. Lady Euphemia, however, placed her in the right position, and then signing to Captain Harding to hold her in it, and restrain any involuntary struggle, she raised the eyelids, and used the camel-hair brush to remove the particles, both above and below—Fenella keeping close behind, supplying her with all she wanted, and ever ready with a hand, or with a fragment of blotting-paper that fortunately had been found in her sketching-case, and which served even better than the paint-brushes. It was a long business, and a very trying one to all parties; and by the time it was over, word was brought that the carriage was ready, thanks to Malcolm Maclaine's exertions, for Mrs. West's beneficent offers of men were more easily made than fulfilled, since, horses and carriages being disposed of in the adjacent farm-buildings usually appropriated to the purpose, all the men had set out for a village hostelry a mile off, and only victimized the smallest page among them to keep watch. Malcolm, being a helpful youth, had thought time best saved by obtaining the assistance of the little tiger in harnessing that giant of the Western Star, the great elephant of a horse, instead of sending him in quest of the coachman. Glentarn and Captain Harding looked well over the harness to secure that nothing was unsafe, and the latter then insisted on driving them home; indeed, he was so much distressed, and took so much blame to himself as host and manager of the party, that no one could gainsay his desire of

being as serviceable as possible, and of being at once on the spot to hear what the doctor said. Johnny entreated to come also, upon the box; and indeed, the whole party meant to return home as soon as it should be possible to collect their various drivers. Lady Euphemia committed the charge of her flock to Fenella, and took possession of Clara, who already clung to her hand, and listened for her voice with the instinctive confidence of a little child or a sick person in a nurse.

How kind and comforting she was in that very painful transit, Clara always declared it was impossible to say. Entering the town, Johnny's sharp eyes detected the doctor's carriage, and he was set down to hasten to meet it, and turn Dr. Sims homewards, so that no time was lost in the examination. The result was that nothing could be guessed as yet as to the future. Violent inflammation was of course setting in, and must be combated by all possible means, and till it had diminished there would be no knowing whether there had been actual injury to the eyesight. The doctor used means for more entirely removing any remains of the fatal white dust that might have lingered; but he owned that very effectual measures had been taken at first, and had done more service than anything subsequent could effect. He and Lady Euphemia were in perpetual contact, and consulted together as old friends. Both were immediately aware that no efficient help was to be found in the house. The maids were all young girls; indeed,

one of them went into hysterics, and both the others were found attending to her when hot water was wanted—whereon Lady Euphemia despatched Johnnie to fetch Bride, feeling very thankful to the instinct of keeping her apart from young Bellenden that had occasioned such ready consent to the girl's self-denying ordinance of staying at home to make up for lost time. Bride was in her degree as good a nurse as her mother, and with her aid all Dr. Sims's orders were carried out, and Clara placed in bed in a cool darkened room, still suffering acutely, but much comforted and soothed by the firm cheerful voices and exceeding kindness.

Captain Harding felt it his duty to start off by train in search of Mr. Braithwayte, to confess how ill he had taken care of his daughter; and though Lady Euphemia doubted the desirability of a great chase and alarm, and proved that the various incompatibilities of trains would prevent a return till ten o'clock at night, he was so determined that he was responsible and had failed in his responsibility, that she could only acquiesce, and in her secret soul be glad that the care of the household should, as soon as possible, be placed in the right hands. So she only endeavoured to prime him with a not too alarming account, and he hastened away to catch the train.

She had hardly returned to the dark room, when the patient, who had hitherto been only able to attend to her own suffering, and had been at length quiet a little while, started up with a mournful wail, 'My cushion! Oh my cushion!'

'Your pillow? Do you want another pillow, my dear? or shall I turn this one?'

'Oh no—no, thank you, it is my cushion. Do you think there is any chance that I can go on with it in time?'

'Her work,' explained Bride.

'Yes, my work. There is but a fortnight more, and Mrs. Henderson will be coming home.'

'My dear, if you cannot manage it, she will quite understand,' said Lady Euphemia, consoling her, much afraid that her despairing quivering tones portended a passion of tears, the most fatal thing for her eyes.

'Oh! I had reckoned so much! I thought myself so sure of finishing. And there are but *two* lilies. Do you think I shall be able to do them? Oh, if I can't—' and the querulous tone betokened feverishness.

'Listen, Clara,' said Lady Euphemia, gravely but kindly, 'how quickly you get well depends on keeping off inflammation. You must use self-command enough to keep from crying, or you will seriously hurt yourself.'

Habitual awe of Lady Euphemia had a minute's effect, but presently she said, 'If I am very good, perhaps I may be able to begin again by Monday.'

'A great deal depends on your being very good,' said her nurse.

'At any rate,' persisted the poor fretful child, with great earnestness, 'you won't let anyone else take it to do. Only let me wait for Monday, and then—'

Mother and daughter were both perfectly aware that many Mondays would pass before Clara would be able to use her eyes again, if ever; but Bride said cheerfully, 'There is no need to think about it till after Monday, and Fenella has gone on so steadily that she means to finish hers on Saturday, and so she will have plenty of time to do what remains of yours.'

'If I can't do it myself, I had rather she did,' said Clara.

Therewith came sounds below-stairs: Mr. Maclaine and Fenella had ridden on the first, and come to inquire. The latter ran up to the sick room, and catching her cue from her sister, at once undertook that she would wait till Monday, and then complete the work if Clara were unable to do it herself.

'Thank you,' said Clara warmly. 'Now there will be an answer for Alice Coxe! But where is poor little Freddy?' she added presently, 'did you see anything of him?'

Fenella had ridden off with her father as soon as the horses could be got ready, but she supposed Freddy was coming home with Effie and the children in the Glentarn coach.

Mr. Maclaine had not dismounted, and his wife stood out in the drive, settling with him how the evening should be disposed of, he desiring her to remain as long as should seem expedient, without anxiety about him or about home, and she saying that she should only wait to commit the care of the poor girl to some efficient person. She was detained

a good while, for the other members of the party came round that way on their return home, and to each carriage-load she had to repeat her explanation of Clara's state, and her inquiries for the unfortunate little author of the mischief. Nobody had seen him, not even Alice Coxe; and after a brief consultation with the driver of the basket-carriage, who seemed the most rational person connected with the Braithwayte establishment, Lady Euphemia sent him back to look for the boy, and returned to Clara's room, whence she hoped to be released, as she had heard some soft gliding steps enter the house, and the plaintive cooings of a mild voice sounded within the apartment. She did not personally know Mrs. Rose, but it was understood that the present curate's family and the widow of the late one were extremely intimate; and no doubt Clara would now be in the right hands. So she gave a very gracious nod to Mary as she passed her waiting in the passage, and proceeded to the room. What did she hear as she came near the open door? Bride's steady voice, with its coaxing Scotch cadences, reminding Clara that she must control herself, and assuring her that Mamma would see about him, as if that was a certain remedy.

'Oh, poor little fellow!' exclaimed Clara; 'and what will Susan do?' There could be no doubt from the sounds that she was crying and sobbing now.

'My love,' murmured the caressing tone of Mrs. Rose, 'it is very sweet to see you thus forgiving for this irreparable injury; and if your unhappy little

brother has any feeling at all, no doubt he would endeavour to fly as far as possible from the sight of your state.'

Lady Euphemia could bear it no longer, and bowing to Mrs. Rose as she passed, said in a matter-of-fact tone, 'I have sent your man back to look for your little brother. I have no doubt he will find him somewhere on the road.'

'Oh! but—' sobbed Clara, 'did you tell him to follow, in case he should have—run away to sea?'

'Little boys of eight years old don't run away to sea,' said Lady Euphemia decidedly. 'No doubt he was afraid to show himself, and no one was likely to remember him. I ought to have told my boys to see after him.'

'Ah! it was so wrong of me,' said Clara.

'You see, Lady Euphemia,' said Mrs. Rose, 'this little fellow has always been delicate; and the youngest of a motherless family has always such claims on his sisters, that I don't wonder at it; but this has been a most awful lesson, and if he is found, I trust he will profit by it.'

'I have not a doubt of his being at home in an hour's time,' said the Lady of Glentarn drily. 'Will you kindly let me pass, or will you change the lotion?'

For Mrs. Rose was standing in the only place whence the patient was accessible.

'Oh, certainly,' (without moving hand or foot,) 'I came quite prepared to take the charge of this dear girl on myself, knowing that it will not do to

summon dear Susan home in haste, for fear of the effect of any shock upon dear Emily.'

Lady Euphemia now made a movement that it was not easy to withstand, obtained access to Clara, and changed the lotion, finding as she did so how much more nervous, trembling, and heated, the hands had become, and hearing the panting breath heaving with sobs. She perceived the state of the case, went into the passage, and beckoning to Mrs. Rose, represented that it was of the greatest consequence that Clara should be kept as quiet as possible, and above all from tears. Therefore the less talking and the fewer people in the room the better.

Mrs. Rose acquiesced. In her position she was well acquainted with illness, and this sweet girl was almost as dear to her as her own.

'However,' said the Lady of Glentarn, 'it is always wisest not to be too lavish of nursing forces just at first; and as I have been hearing the doctor's directions, I think I had better take the care of her for this evening till her father comes home.'

She looked so entirely as if her will were indisputable, that Mrs. Rose could do no more than murmur a little about Mr. Braithwayte's gratitude, and keeping herself in reserve—she would be at hand in the drawing-room the instant she was wanted. And thither accordingly she withdrew with her daughter.

There they had the satisfaction of receiving Freddy, who had in fact been forgotten, and had

been met by the basket-carriage, in the worst of tempers at having been left behind. That the driver had scolded him all the way back had only put him on the surly defensive against all the blame that might await him at home; and Clara's anxieties were first set at rest by his loud wrangling voice shouting to one of the maids to take off his boots for him, and to bring him something to eat. She uttered a sigh and exclamation of relief, but assented willingly to the advice not to send for him; only she should like to know that he was all right.

Mrs. Rose was down-stairs, and would see to him, said Lady Euphemia; but to this Clara despairingly responded, 'Oh, she will only make him ten times worse; and that blue ball, it was Mrs. Henderson's, and there will not be enough without it. If it only could be got away from him!'

So Bride went down in quest of intelligence, and found Master Frederick certainly in no state to excite anxiety either for his health or spirits, devouring a tartlette with great indifference to the pathetic purling flow of talk that Mrs. Rose and her daughter were alternately performing at him, the burthen of their song being, 'How could he?' and 'Was not he sorry?' He made no answer for some time, even when told that Miss Maclaine was surprised at him. Bride was as angry with him as either of them could be, but she made her tone most matter-of-fact as she told him that his sister had been very anxious about him, and had sent her down to see that he was not too much tired.

She thought the boy looked softened; but Mary at once began, 'Dear Clara!—I am sure, Freddy, you must be touched. You are sorry now, I am sure! You would be so comfortable if you only said so!'

'Served her right,' growled Freddy.

'Ah! poor child, he does not know what he is saying,' said Mrs. Rose, with an air of angelic pity.

'Served her right for bothering about those cushions.'

The sister of seven brothers was not so unaware of boy nature as not to know that there is nothing savage that cannot be elicited by reproachful sentiment. Indeed, she had a certain inclination to take Freddy's part; but perceiving the inexpedience of this, she cast her eye over his person to see whether there were any excrescence in his pocket that could be the blue ball; and failing in this, she left him to his fate, and returned to Clara with the intelligence that he seemed quite well, but she did not think he had the ball about him, and she would wait to ask him till she could get him alone.

'O yes,' said Clara, 'it is no use to ask the boys anything if Mrs. Rose is in the way. You won't leave me to her—please—' she said imploringly.

'No, my dear, I will not leave you till your father comes home,' said Lady Euphemia.

'Oh, thank you. I do like your hand. But oh! that ball!'

Bride suggested that she and Fenella seemed likely to have such large remains of blue, that a general contribution might suffice to finish Clara's

grounding; but the feverish conscience was incapable of balance, and when Clara dozed in the heat of that oppressive summer evening, it was to dream of blue balls in a glaring white sea.

All that time Mrs. Rose sat in the drawing-room, pitying and auguring blindness to Clara, a fatal shock to Emily, (*N. B.* there was no reason at all but in Mrs. Rose's fancy why a shock should be particularly injurious at present to Emily,) depravity to Freddy, and a broken heart to Mr. Braithwayte, with which they worked themselves up to so sweet a state of melancholy complacency, that when at length Mr. Braithwayte hurried in, Mary was in tears, and her mother received him with, 'Yes, you always find me in the house of mourning.'

Luckily for him there were more cheery voices above stairs, that spoke of hope that the alarm would be only temporary, and that care and watchfulness would avert serious consequences. The poor man did not know how to express his gratitude for what had already been done; but as to this tender close watchfulness, he knew not where to turn for it. Even a telegram would not bring Susan for at least thirty-six hours, and those the most critical. Mrs. Henderson was away, the old nurse of Clara's infancy out of reach and decrepid. Could a nurse be spared from the infirmary? He would walk up, consult the doctor, and beg for one.

'I think,' said Lady Euphemia, 'that you may safely trust my daughter to do all that is needed at night. We have had at times a good deal of illness

in the house, and she is a very careful nurse. I would remain myself, only that my husband is apt to suffer so much at night that I cannot be away; but I think Bride will make her as comfortable as possible, and I will come as early as I can to-morrow —by the time Dr. Sims makes his visit, I hope.'

She had the same promise to give to the patient herself, who, too fevered and uncomfortable for clear comprehension of what she was asking, entreated, 'Don't go, oh! don't go;' then was soothed by the promise of having Bride with her, and the explanation of the necessity of the case. Indeed, when her kind friend had bidden her good-night, she roused up enough to have some compunction as to whether she had not been selfish and exacting in clinging thus to the care of one who must need rest by day; but Bride consoled her upon this point. 'How Mamma managed it,' she said, 'she did not know; but no one would ever find out from her looks and ways by day whether Papa had had a bad night or not;' and Clara recollected, with a sort of languid sense of shame and ingratitude, many a hard thing that had been said of the stiffness and exclusiveness of the Scotch family.

Mr. Braithwayte escorted Lady Euphemia home, leaving Mrs. and Miss Rose at the door of their Turtle-nest, and receiving from them renewed assurances that they would come in the morning and do everything they could for poor dear Clara and for him, and they would comport themselves towards Freddy as he thought best.

The boy had gone to bed before his father had come home; but all his amiable replies had been duly reported; and poor Mr. Braithwayte, used only to Susan's sedulously rose-coloured accounts of her darling, was thoroughly dispirited and shocked. Even Lady Euphemia, though giving him some comfort by her assurance that probably the child did not know the effects of lime, and that these dreadful replies had been only caused by mismanagement, did not know of the plot that Freddy had acted out only too zealously, and could only talk from the experience of boys in general. However, when the Curate carried home Bride's little *sac de nuit*, in which Fenella had providently placed her work, his spirits were many degrees above the point where they had been when he turned from the door of the Turtle-nest.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRANSFER.

BRIDE, by her mother's desire, did not sit up all night, but slept on a bed on the floor, and was constantly ready, whenever Clara stirred, to put on the cold applications by which the inflammation was combated. And in the long morning, she found light enough close to the crack of the

shutters, to pursue her work, whilst Clara was asleep, behind the curtain that kept her entirely in the dark. There was much need of diligence, since the nurse had thrust quite enough care of the small children on her to interrupt her effectually all the morning.

Clara had been perfectly still for a long time, when at length she called, 'Bride, you were very kind yesterday, when you said Fenella would finish my poor cushion; but, do you know, I think Alice Coxe ought to have it.'

'She would be very much pleased,' said Bride.

'Yes!' sighed Clara, 'that is the horrid thing! She is so uppish! I know she has done nothing but wish one of us to fail; and how little I thought I should be the one! But I know I deserve it. I quite set her upon Camilla yesterday; and just because I hate it so, I know she ought to have the work. I dare say she asked for it last night!'

'I don't think she did,' said Bride. 'Fenella said nobody seemed more grieved than she. I think you are quite right, though, Clara dear. It was quite understood that she was to make up any gaps. And, do you know,' she added consolingly, 'I have very nearly been a defaulter, from sheer idleness, too. I lost one day, and have been running after it ever since, without catching it. That would be much worse than missing, as you do—'

'You!' exclaimed Clara. 'You were the one we made most sure of, next to me,' she said, with

a sigh. 'Dr. Henderson said he knew you would undertake nothing you would not do.'

'More shame for me,' said Bride.

'I begin to think,' said Clara, 'that nobody's will be done, but yours, and Fenella's, and Joanna's. She has been much steadier than I ever expected. But will you please pack up mine, and I will ask Papa to send it to Mrs. Coxe's. Then I shall get it off my mind. Only, if Freddy would tell what he did with the blue?'

'Shall I write a note?'

'If you please. Only don't ask me to send any message, for I shall only say something horrid. No—I am not good at all about it; for I know the little conceited sprite has been watching for something to happen, all this time, and that now she is very glad, and will be horrider than ever. I don't send it to her a bit because it is right; but because Dr. Henderson will be displeased if I don't.'

'I am sure you are right in doing so,' said Bride, 'however you have brought yourself to it. And you will be all the more comfortable.'

Clara made a little petulant sound, but then added, 'I can't help it, Bride. I did think myself so sure of finishing this work; and now, not only to fail, but even to have lost this unhappy blue ball. I am always seeing the blue thing in the middle of the glaring white mortar. If Freddy would only tell what he has done with it.'

'It would hardly be fit to use.'

'No. Please tell Alice to match the wool, and I will pay for it.'

Not finding writing materials readily, Bride decided on carrying the work herself to Alice Coxe, on her way home; but in the meantime, she had to keep Clara's mind composed by going down to attend to the breakfast of Mr. Braithwayte and the two boys—and she saw symptoms of severe warfare. Mr. Braithwayte, who had been very early in his daughter's room, was very kind to Bride herself, most grateful to her, and anxious to make things pass off well; but he was, at the same time, treating his youngest son with the most marked silent displeasure; and Freddy was in a state of defiant sullenness, which did not, however, prevent him from helping himself, unasked, to a rasher, hot roll, and marmalade. Before breakfast was over, Lady Euphemia appeared, according to promise; and Bride, expecting at once to be sent home, went up to take leave of Clara, and collect her properties. Instead of this, however, she was kept waiting for a considerable time; her mother only came and looked at the patient, and then went down again—and echoes of voices came up-stairs, making Clara so restless, that Bride was fain to keep the door shut.

In fact, no sooner had poor Mr. Braithwayte found himself with the only person who had yet spoken a comfortable word to him, than he began to pour out his anxieties, his great alarm about Clara, and her feverish night; and thence—though

in general a reserved man—he could not help going on to the discoveries that he had been making, all that morning and the evening before, from Mrs. Rose and the servants, of all Freddy's delinquencies, which Susan had so studiously concealed from him. Now they had broken on the poor father, in one exaggerated burst—tales of defiant disobedience and mischief, insolence, cowardice, falsehood—giving the impression of little short of depravity in the boy; and of weakness, leading to deception, in the sister. He himself had endeavoured to obtain some confession, or contrition, from his son, but had been met by the most obdurate and impenetrable sullenness, such as had nearly brought him to despair. Personal humiliation, as one who had neglected to order his own household, and disappointment in the daughter on whom he had relied, were renewing his grief for the lost mother; and the grave, distant, dry clergyman was ready to cast himself upon the cold, high-bred Scotswoman, for sympathy at least—nay, as he soon found, for comfort. In the first place, Lady Euphemia did not think Clara nearly as ill, or her eyesight in as much danger, as he did; then, she could find excuses for the elder sister, and even cast some doubts on the perfect credibility of all Freddy's enormities; while, as to his present impenitence, she ventured to suggest that a sudden plunge from the heights of favouritism to the depths of disgrace, was the very mode to cause silent sulkiness. Just then, the maid ushered in Mrs. and Miss Rose,

full of pity and proffers of service; and in the midst of these, came the doctor, with whom Lady Euphemia went up-stairs, but exchanged a word on the way with her daughter, whom she desired to wait to give her account of the night. 'I shall soon be free, now the Roses are come,' she said; 'and then we will walk home together.'

For Lady Euphemia, albeit no gossip, had imbibed the general opinion that Mrs. Rose was the most appropriate superintendent for Mr. Braithwayte's household, and very likely permanently to become so. However, in the middle of the examination of the patient, a horrible compound of noises made Clara leap up in her bed, and brought all the rest of the house together; Mr. Braithwayte from his anxious watch in the study, the doctor from up-stairs—only Lady Euphemia remaining to soothe the frightened girl.

It then appeared that Mrs. Rose had found Freddy with his elbows against the slab in the entry, watching a bottle of leeches. She had there been doing her utmost to bring him to a sense of his own unfeeling conduct, talking to him in the gentlest, most soothing manner; and meantime leaning against the slab, for she was too dependent not to be ever resting on something. Suddenly, just as she came to 'Now, my dear little fellow, we should all be so much happier'—down lapsed the slab, against the wall staggered Mrs. Rose, and the floor swam with leeches and broken glass! Freddy was much maligned, if he

had not removed the prop! At any rate, when Bride hurried back with the report that no harm was done, and Lady Euphemia went to the scene of action, she found Mr. Braithwayte, with a gesture of bewildered despair, ordering the culprit off to solitary confinement in his room till he could come to a better mind.

'Better let me take him home,' said Lady Euphemia, as the boy slowly trailed himself upstairs; 'it is the surest way to have the house quiet, and his sister not fretting about him.'

'Such an indulgence—and such a boy!' said Mr. Braithwayte. 'Indeed, with many many thanks, it is hardly right for me to let him go till he has shewn some signs of contrition.'

'And in the meantime, his sister will be injured on his account,' said the doctor drily. 'It is part of my prescription, that he be sent out of the house.'

'Indeed, I would gladly take him, and try to work upon his dormant conscience by every tender art,' said Mrs. Rose; 'only our little pittance affords us no spare room!'

Lady Euphemia repeated her offer, and Mr. Braithwayte could not do other than accept it, at least till Susan should come home; and then, retiring into the study, doctor and lady tried to talk the poor father out of his universal despondency, even as to present care of Clara. 'Could a nurse be sent for?' he was asking; and Lady Euphemia, with all her sense of the impropriety of taking

other people's duties, felt it a mere call of humanity to assure him that she and her two daughters could undertake the nursing till Susan came home.

His gratitude was beyond all expression; and when the doctor had taken leave, and Lady Euphemia was just going up-stairs to send home Bride, he made a demonstration to delay her for a moment; and said, with an odd gleam of shy humour on his face, as he nodded towards the drawing-room, where Mrs. Rose and her daughter were—'I am specially thankful, because, among other reasons, certain help is at least mitigated, if it cannot be averted.'

Lady Euphemia, suddenly regarding him as possessed of more sense than she had supposed, gave a significant look and smile, and passed on, to tell Bride to take Freddy home with her, and to place him under the care of Fenella and Malcolm. Bride herself was strictly enjoined by her mother to go and lie down till luncheon time, after explaining matters to her father. With the companionship of Malcolm, Glentarn was less in need than usual of the attention of his wife and elder daughters; and he was so unselfish, that he was sure to put himself quite out of the question, rather than hinder them from doing an act of kindness.

Indeed, when Freddy had been—to his own great surprise—summoned down from his captivity, and delivered over to Bride, rather as if he had been a little wild beast, she found her father, with two of her brothers, just outside, talking to the

doctor; he having taken his morning walk in that direction, to inquire for the patient, and meet either or both of his ladies, should they be going home. He fully approved, and was only anxious that Bride should go home and rest; but he made no objection to her stopping at Uplands by the way, to leave the work for Alice Coxe, saying he would take a few turns on the terrace while she went in.

Bride only knew Alice Coxe through the chance meetings that brought them together; their parents did not visit; and the interior of the house was new to her—not that it was unlike all other such houses, except in the precision with which it was evidently kept in order by the inhabitants. When she asked to speak to Miss Coxe, sending in her name, she was ushered into an empty drawing-room; the family having evidently not finished breakfast, though their earlier neighbours had long been up and abroad.

In a moment, Alice was in the room, but not with her usual elate tripping step; she came slowly, almost reluctantly, and the clear little black eyes were absolutely hazy with tears.

'Ah!' she exclaimed, as she saw the bag carried by Bride, 'it is just what I was afraid of! How is poor dear Clara?'

'Rather better, we hope, this morning; but she must not try to do anything for a long time, and so she desired me to ask if you could finish for her?'

The tears swelled up and rushed out, as Alice put her hands behind her, saying, 'Oh dear! oh dear! I don't know if I can. Poor, poor Clara!'

'Do you mean that you have not time?' said Bride, a little displeased.

'Oh no—no—no!' cried the little eager thing, fighting with her tears, and speaking in gusty little gasps; 'but I had wished it so much—and hoped—and—and prayed for it—and now it does seem so dreadful—just as if I had done it. Oh, poor Clara!'

'Don't vex yourself,' said Bride kindly; 'you know it was a good wish; and it is very well that we know so exactly what to do with the work.'

'Oh, but it was not good in me,' said Alice, as out-spoken in her self-reproach as in her eagerness. 'I only wanted to do it, because it seemed—grown up—and grand, and I do so hate to be left out. O Miss Maclaine, I never knew before, what a shocking thing it is to get one's wish!'

Bride hardly knew what to say to such a mood as this, and she was besides anxious not to keep her father waiting. All she could do, was to give Alice a kind kiss, and say, 'Well, if I were you, I would not think too much about that. My mother always says that if we were always trying to weigh our motives, we should just grow melancholy mad, and do nothing; but we must go right on to the duty in hand;' and then, giving in haste the message about the wool, she made her escape, anxious to prevent the girl from bursting out with any more self-reproach. Indeed, the bestowal of such con-

fidence on a comparative stranger, was so alien to Bride's whole nature, that she was somewhat doubtful as to its sincerity, and was glad to get away.

Alice remained, gazing with overflowing eyes at the unfinished lilies, and recollecting, for the hundredth time since the accident, her own mortification at being treated as an ineffective child—she who was used to be Papa's pet, Mamma's right hand—the infallible referee of her younger sisters—always first, always alert; and her ardent desire that something should bring these fine come-out girls to own her value—that some amusement should lure them away; nay, some slight accident befall them; and that they should be forced to accept her services. And now, the little heart, sensitive in spite of its frank openness, was so full of compassion and self-reproach, that, instead of a triumph, the much-desired work seemed only a penance for her selfish aspirations and unkind wishes. Nobody must pet and congratulate her; and she ran away with it to her room, to put it out of sight, till she could bear to talk of it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A RELUCTANT PENELOPE.

'How soon could Susan Braithwayte be fetched home?' was the great question in several households. No letter had been written on the Thursday evening, when the accident had happened; and she was in so remote a place, that Friday's letters would not be due there till Sunday, and then it was believed that they were not sent for till Monday.

Mrs. Rose urged Mr. Braithwayte to telegraph, but he was reluctant to cause so much sensation; and moreover, he thought that his daughter, starting on Saturday, would get into difficulties with Sunday trains, and therefore was glad to find that Lady Euphemia agreed with him that he had better trust to the post, which would enable him to ask a friend to meet Susan in London, and see her from one station to the other.

Meantime, affairs continued in the same state. Clara, who had no doubt been overworked and harassed during the four weeks of her sister's absence, had a trying feverish attack, not dangerous, except as aggravating the injury to her eyes, and requiring very careful and tender nursing. This the Maclaine family afforded her in full measure. The two elder girls took turns to be with her at

night, and their mother spent several hours of each day with her, and was completely her head nurse, and the chief consoler of Mr. Braithwayte. Indeed, Clara was always better and happier in her keeping, less despondent about her eyes, less restless about her father's comfort, not so uneasy about the lost blue ball, and free from the visits of Mrs. Rose, who used to come and stand over her, with plaintive sympathy that brought her to tears, and Bride or Fenella to despairing stratagems for devising a summons from down-stairs.

For Mrs. Rose and Mary had settled themselves in the drawing-room, where one sat in an arm-chair, the other on the sofa, 'always ready to offer their poor sympathy, or to perform any little service,' as they told everybody. However, the offer was scarcely accepted, for Mr. Braithwayte never came near the room; and their services consisted in returning answers to the numerous inquiries at the door—that 'Miss Clara had had a very bad night, and the inflammation was very serious.'

These inquiries were made with the greatest diligence by the Falconberg servants, who never failed to bring with them gifts of fruit, ice, jellies, and flowers, with Mrs. and Miss West's love and compliments—gifts that were of great value in that room of fever. Kind-hearted as she was, however, Mrs. West thought 'there was such a thing as going too far,' and this she considered that the Maclaines did. Their devotion to the sufferer she considered as inexplicable, unless the Braithwaytes had any

Scotch blood; but hearing they were a Cumberland family, she observed that all the North folk hung together, and on these geographical grounds became somewhat better satisfied. But it was a grievance that the Maclaines were so fully occupied, that the pleasant party which had made the last week or two so brilliant was broken up. Perhaps it was no small evidence of Bride Maclaine's good taste, that it was only plain in her absence how much of the general brightness and pleasantness had been owing to her —not so much from her powers of conversation, as from her ability to keep the wheels going, to devise interests without putting herself forward, and to help everyone to appear to the best advantage. Certain it is, that when she was no longer there, everything became flat and dull; Camilla could not find anything to say beyond the most obvious common-places; and Walter Bellenden, who had thought the society exceedingly pleasant, without analyzing its charm, and while talking to Bride, deemed himself highly sagacious for paying attentions to Camilla, now found the whole set insufferably tedious; and being not yet reduced to the necessity of fortune-hunting, he gladly accepted a proposal from a yachting friend who put into the bay on Saturday, and offered to take him and his brother to the west coast of Ireland.

'And so,' said Joanna Harding triumphantly, 'the enemy is driven off the field! *Abiit, evasit, erupit,* and all the rest of it; and not a stitch the less has been done for them.'

'Ay,' said Miles, 'they have kept you up to it.'

'Forshame, Miles! You don't imagine that it was all for show and contradiction?'

'I scorn to insinuate,' said Miles. 'I only remark that no circumstance could have been more favourable—as it appears,' he added, leaving the room as Joanna opened her work, with much exultation, for inspection.

'But, my dear,' said her mother, 'why have you done that great piece of grounding before finishing your last lily?'

Joan began something about rolling it up all together, but stopped half way; and her mother added, looking at the fifth, the last lily but one, 'Surely, my dear, there is something wrong here. Is not this stem too short?'

'Yes, Mamma,' said Joan. 'One day, when Herbert and Charles were teazing, I made a mistake of three stitches. I thought it would not signify, and that I could get it right on the other side of the flower; but somehow I could not manage it, and it only grew worse, so that I was in a confusion altogether, and went on in another place, till I had time to bring it round.'

'I am afraid, Joan, no way of "bringing it round" is possible, but one.'

'O Mamma, it would be so dreadful to pick out such a quantity.'

'It is a pity you did not do so at first.'

'Why—yes, Mamma; but then I thought I could get it right, by getting this leaf three stitches

longer; and those boys would have been so intolerable if they had seen me undoing it! Do you really think I cannot coax it right? or I shall not be the first to finish.'

'The first and the worst—eh, Joan?'

'But picking out will make it so messy—I do so hate undoing. O Mamma, must I? Nobody will ever see it, when it is once made up.'

> 'Think not, because no man sees,
> Such things will remain unseen,'

was Mrs. Harding's answer.

Joan coloured up to the ears, as she recollected the purpose of her cushion, unthreaded her needle, and began to take out her work. A whole flower and a half, with a good many leaves, had to be demolished; and presently Joan heaved a deep sigh, and observed, 'One comfort is, they don't come home till the end of September.'

'Don't make too sure of that.'

'O Mamma! Eliza told me so, and she heard it from Sims, who had been to inquire after poor Clara.'

'Rather dangerous authority,' said Mrs. Harding. 'Oh! take care, my dear Joan; you will certainly do mischief with those scissors.'

'Mamma, you don't mean that it must all be taken out stitch by stitch!'

'Indeed, Joan, I know no other safe method.'

'Really and truly, Mamma, I am very careful; I am sure I can do it without cutting a thread of the

canvas. O Mamma, why are you looking at me in that way? Do you really forbid me to use the scissors on my obedience?'

'My dear Joan, I think it would be the greatest kindness to forbid you, as you say, on your obedience. Only think where you would be if you did cut a thread. This is not like a trumpery bit of house furniture, where one would be content with imperfection; but to offer a spoilt thing, that might have been saved by a little time and trouble, is what you would never bear to do.'

Joan coloured, and pouted, made the scissors ring sharply as she threw them on the table, and said, 'It is entirely because you order me, Mamma.'

Mrs. Harding made no answer. It hurt her very much to put Joan out of temper, even though she knew that it would not last long, and that the girl would soon be thankful to her; but perhaps she dreaded the repentance almost as much as the offence, for she leant back on her sofa and shut her eyes, as if she were conscious that the silence was like the lull in the centre of a cyclone; and she thus spared herself the sight of Joanna tugging away at all the more refractory of her stitches with a violence that threatened to render even her blunt carpet-needle as dangerous to the canvas as even the scissors.

After all, the storm was averted for the present. Visitors were announced; and Joan, having no time to escape, had to throw her work into the basket, smoothe her brow, and again discuss the story of

Clara Braithwayte's accident. Just as they were gone, Captain Harding and Miles came in, the latter much excited about some curious fossils that were reported to have been found in some excavations that were being made in the neighbourhood. The carriage was coming round, and the whole party set off together to make inquiries about them. Miles had a great turn for geology, and Joan was always eager to share in his interests, so the news entirely put her work troubles and tempers out of her head; she became possessed of the magnificent idea of finding a whole pterodactyle, and sitting up in the back seat with Miles, she talked palæontology without intermission for four miles.

The Pterodactylus Hardingii was not found, or Joan failed to distinguish him if he were there; but quite specimens enough of other kinds were inspected and purchased, to occupy both her and Miles, and give a fresh impulse to the pursuit that had of late somewhat languished for want of fresh aliment.

Mrs. Harding could not help feeling relieved that Joan had recovered her good humour without an oppressive burst of remorse, while yet temper mingled with her self-reproach. And even the excellent mother could not find it in her heart to run the risk of conjuring up a storm by hinting at the work, when she saw her daughter so happy and bright, scraping the earth off the most prized of her trilobites, and chattering long names in the gayest voice.

Only at bed-time did Joanna glide into her

mother's room in her dressing-gown, and preface her lass kiss with, 'Mamma, I was dreadfully cross to you to-day. Pray forgive me. I am *so* sorry.'

It was thoroughly sincere; the motherly kiss was given, and Joan went away, able to feel herself at peace, and to lie down to rest with a sense that her petulance had been repented and forgiven. She actually took out a whole petal of her flower before going to bed that night, and thus awoke in the morning with a conscience free.

Yes, and a mind free too, to throw itself into Miles's geology. He had found a new book, with distinctions that necessitated an entire new arrangement of the joint museum of specimens; and as the various bones, stones, and shells, lay reposing on beds of their own dust, this was by no means a rapid affair, engrossing as it was. It involved, also, much reading and searching in books; and the consequence was that Joan was hardly ever without either a fossil or a book in her hand.

After two or three days, Mrs. Harding ventured to inquire, 'My dear, how have you got on with your unpicking?'

'O Mamma, there's plenty of time for that; you know that the Hendersons don't come home till the end of September.'

CHAPTER XIX.

THE EXILE.

MASTER Freddy Braithwayte considered himself to have had a great escape when he was taken away from gloom and displeasure at home to the lively companionship of the young Maclaines. To be sure, his character as a very naughty boy had preceded him, and caused Chrissie, Annie, and the lesser ones, to keep their distance from him, regarding him rather as if *the* naughty boy of their story-books had assumed life and individuality among them. But as Fred was far from ambitious of their society, this was no great loss to him; and Angus and Nial being school acquaintance, he had plenty of common ground with them, and could, like them, follow the great examples of their brothers Malcolm and Rory.

That afternoon they all went out fishing, under the charge of a steady old boatman and his son; and though the honour of the thing was greater than the pleasure as far as Freddy was concerned, since he was very sick, a good deal frightened, and was scolded whenever he tried to move, yet it was the fulfilment of one of the ambitions of his life, and he could boast of it for the future to his school-fellows and Johnny, without a hint of the misery he had undergone.

But the next morning he learnt what was to be endured in the Glentarn family! First, he was pulled out of bed by Nial at what he considered a frightful hour, and found himself obliged to perform his own toilette, without the assistance that he had been wont to receive from one or other of his sisters. The condition of his hair, however, did not concern him much; and as shock-heads of various shades from the sanguine to the sandy were the rule in the family, he did not look so very unlike the rest.

Mr. Maclaine never left his room till late in the forenoon, but Lady Euphemia read prayers; and Freddy wondered at the long dining-table, with nothing upon it but a spoon by each chair, a large jug of milk at the upper end, a bowl of brown sugar at the bottom, and a salt-cellar at either corner. During the short interval after prayers, Lady Euphemia occupied herself with hearing a verse of a hymn repeated by her youngest but one; and presently the butler entered, bearing a tray, from whence he proceeded to set down a series of bowls, containing, as Fred supposed, bread-and-milk. This was bad enough; he had rebelled against bread-and-milk so long ago, that he could scarcely even remember the contest; but he stood in far too much awe of Lady Euphemia to offer any protest, and only wriggled disconsolately to an empty chair between Malcolm and one of the bigger girls—he did not know them apart.

It was worse than his imagination. Never had he expected to be set down to a bowl of whitey-

brown paste, without any alternative. The jug of milk was circulating, and everybody, from the mother downwards, was beginning on the messes as a matter of course—young ladies, little ones, boys, and all. Freddy sat, spoon in hand, in dreadful silent suspense; but when his neighbour, Effie, offered to pour out some milk, he ventured a gasp, 'It is paste!'

'It is oatmeal-porridge,' said Effie; 'it is the best stuff in the world.'

'It will stick my inside together,' murmured the miserable Fred, looking aghast.

The words were caught up and repeated by Annie on the other side of the table, and infinite was the tittering that prevailed at that lower end, but suppressed, for Mamma was reading her letters, with the baby on her knee, and talking or laughing at meals was not permitted to the younger fry, only just connived at in a subdued form when Malcolm and Roderick were at home for the holidays.

'Try,' whispered Effie, patronizingly pouring in some milk, and adding sugar; 'you don't know how good it is.—Hush! Annie; Mamma will hear.'

Freddy took up his spoon, but the pale sticky mess did look to him far too dreadful; and he who had lately howled at the sight of roast veal, now durst not even utter a murmur at this fearful compound, so awed was he by the hushed voices, and the tall lady who presided. There he sat, spoon in hand, tears standing in his eyes, until Effie took pity on him, and divining what was the matter,

whispered an order to Chrissie, who at once sprang up and ran off.

'What is it?' asked Lady Euphemia, looking up.

'Only he is not used to porridge,' said Effie, 'so I thought he might have a slice of bread-and-butter.'

'He is only English,' said little Flora, the baby but one, with a whole world of Celtic contempt in her voice; and Lady Euphemia, satisfied that the dangerous example of daintiness was not likely to spread among her flock, said, 'Oh, certainly,' with the greater hospitality; and Fred was obliged to be absolutely grateful for two thick slices of bread-and-butter from the breakfast of the English servants, and a cup of cold milk. For though for guests at Glentarn Lady Euphemia would have spread the delicious Scotch breakfast with delicacies innumerable, here in private she was glad to economize. She herself, in truth, preferred the porridge to all other fare; and her children were proud to do the same.

When the meal was over, he tried to astonish the minds of Nial and Annie by discoursing to them of the ham, tongue, eggs, rolls, cocoa, and coffee, that he might enjoy at home; but he found that instead of envying his privileges, they were inclined to regard them as Cyrus did the Median delicacies; and in the midst he heard the dread Lady Euphemia, as she swept by on her way to go to his sister, say to Bride, who had been the one at home that night, 'Don't let that boy do nothing all day; you had better make him do his holiday task with Nial.'

Freddy would much like to have rebelled, but instinct and example alike taught him that Miss Maclaine could not well be treated as he used his sisters, and he was obliged to submit, and likewise to make it evident how exceedingly small was his knowledge of that same task. Nobody was disposed to make his visit particularly pleasant to him, and Bride was resolute not to let him go to play with the other boys till he should have properly repeated the portion she had marked off for him. And the school-room in the morning was a far from engaging place. No tricks were played there in lesson-time. Everybody knew that the time for play depended on their steadiness at lessons; and the mother had so strongly impressed her spirit of discipline on her two daughter-viceroys, that no one ventured to trifle; or if there were such an attempt, it was quashed directly by public opinion as well as by authority. There was something very awful to Freddy in the quick steady way in which they all, from Effie down to little Eva, sat upright on their high stools, and did what they had to do, and nothing else—no chattering—no whisper—no pictures on the slates—and, what was more surprising still, no dawdling. The lesser children came up in turn, went through their little tasks with Bride or Effie, and then were dismissed for sleep or walk; and the bigger ones went from one lesson to another in due course without needless words. Freddy really did not feel capable of such attention, except in the last few minutes at school, in the immediate terror of

being called up; and he spent so much time in thinking how hard it was to have tasks to do when out visiting, and wondering how Angus and Nial could stand it from a sister, that he knew as little of his lesson—Gray's Bard—when Bride called him to say it, as he did when he had come into the school-room. But then he had one consolation. If Nial Maclaine was always far before him in school, it was at the cost of being basely submissive to sisters; and moreover, Freddy *knew* that he breakfasted on that horrible stuff every morning.

Bride had quite enough to do without forcing 'Ruin seize thee, ruthless King,' into an unwilling stranger; so she released Freddy in the general clearance of the school-room; but again he had to undergo the horrors of a Glentarn meal. There was luncheon, indeed, in the dining-room for the elders and any chance guest, but the younger part of the family were on this occasion set down to a knuckle of veal and rice. Freddy was forced to endure them without tears; but he formed a decided purpose, which only became strengthened when he found that the three elder boys were going out with their father, and that he and Nial must join the walk on which the school-room party were despatched. The day happened to be one of the doubtful sloppy ones, when diversions on the beach were impossible, and nothing could be done but to take a formal parade in so frequented a path, that Bride insisted on steadiness in her flock; and Nial was quite as amenable as any of his sisters. Fred would bear it

no longer; he slipped away from the party as they returned home, and made his way towards his father's house. The children missed him, and pointed out his absence to Bride; but she hinted that he might wish to inquire after his sister, and was glad to see this sign of grace and feeling, though Effie indignantly declared that she did not believe he cared a rush for his sister, or had any more feeling than a stone.

Freddy rang at his own door with a loud peal. One of the maids opened it. 'Bless me, Master Fred! I might have known it, for anyone but you would have had too much thought for your poor sister not to ring as if you'd bring the house down. So you've come to ask after her at last, be you?'

'No, I'm not,' said Fred sulkily; 'I'm come home.'

And he pushed past the maid, and into the drawing-room. There sat Mrs. Rose and Mary. 'Ah! Freddy! good morning. I hope you are come to make your peace with your father. Do not be afraid, my child; I will intercede for you, if you will once own your error.'

Freddy vouchsafed no answer at all, but retreated, clapping the door after him, and entered the study, where he found his brother, putting pictures, cut from the Illustrated News, into a blue paper scrap-book.

'Freddy! Of course, banging all the doors!—What brings you here?' was John's salutation.

'I'm come to stay.'

'What, have they turned you out?'

'No; but they don't give one anything fit for a pig to eat. Nothing but paste and veal; and lessons to learn! I'm not going back.'

'I don't think Papa will let you stay here.'

'I shall stay.'

'Then don't bother.'

'What are you doing?'

'Finishing a picture-book poor Clara promised the lame little Daniels. I promised her I would, for she was uneasy about it. Now don't you meddle. They are Clara's, and I promised to take care of them.'

'You might let me look,' growled Freddy.

'You will mix them all up together.'

'No, I won't.'

Therewith Freddy and Johnny went together by the ears, and made a tumble down of selves and chair on the floor, where they were rolling when their father opened the door.

'Get up. I am ashamed of you, making this intolerable noise.'

'He hurt my knee,' moaned Freddy, with knuckles in his eye.

'And pray what are you doing here? I thought the Maclaines had taken charge of you.'

'I want to stay at home,' returned the boy.

'But I cannot keep you here,' said Mr. Braithwayte. 'There is quite trouble and anxiety enough in the house already, without your adding to it. Or —did they send you home?'

'No,' Fred was forced to own. 'I came away; I don't like being there.'

'I cannot help that; I cannot have you at home. Did you tell anyone that you were coming away?'

'No.'

'Then go back at once. I cannot have you quarrelling and making a continual noise, when everything depends on your sister's being kept quiet.'

'May I come home when Susan comes?' said Freddy.

'I don't know; it depends. Go back now, unless you have anything really to say to me,' added Mr. Braithwayte, in a tone meant as encouragement in repentance; but Freddy, taking it as the prelude to a lecture, thought it time to be off, and marched away, to all appearance as obdurate as ever. And yet the visit at home had had some effect. He had become convinced that his sister was really very ill; though, from an odd mixture of shyness and sullenness, he had not chosen to make any inquiry after her.

When he arrived again at his place of exile, everybody received him with the question, 'Well, how did you find her?' Even Mr. Maclaine himself, who had taken no other notice of his unwilling little guest, met him on the stairs, and put the same query, to which it was highly inconvenient to have no answer but 'I don't know.'

And on the whole Fred did wish to know what his sister's state might be. He did not choose to ask direct after her, but he felt sorry not to have

imbibed some clearer information at home, instead of merely perceiving that everybody thought her really ill. He even formed a purpose of contriving to hear Lady Euphemia's report when she should come home, but he was swept off with the other young ones to bed long before she re-appeared.

Then came the Sunday—a day very unlike the home Sundays. The Braithwayte family had been so much afraid of making the day oppressive to the children, that they had done pretty much as they pleased on it; the sisters had tamed themselves as they grew older, but Freddy and even Johnny were used to nearly as much liberty as on week-days, and to more indulgence.

And here the Scotch Sunday had been transplanted in full force. It seemed to Fred that nobody was allowed to do anything but learn hymns and collects before church, and say them after church. To be sure, none were required from him; but everybody else was learning in various corners and sunny windows, and could not speak to him; and all the amusing literature, and every species of toy, had been swept out of the way and put out of sight. When Freddy tried to refresh himself by making a lasso with a piece of whip-cord, and trying to noose Annie's foot, he was called to order by Fenella, and offered the Shadow of the Cross; but after a short time he wearied of this, and betook himself to the stair-case, where he was enjoying the solace of whipping each individual rail of the balusters with his string, when the butler, a sharp

little quick-eyed Highlander, descended on him, and saying something utterly unintelligible, excepting a few words about a 'meneester's son' and 'the honourable Sabbath,' confiscated the string, and thus deprived him of his last and only comfort, making cat's cradle. The church-going was the only part of the day that was in the least natural, and even there Fred found himself not allowed to repair to the corner, where he was wont to wriggle, stare, and sleep, but was still kept among those models of straight decorum, the Maclaines. Moreover, Fred carried away the impression that there was something odd in his father's voice and manner. The longer the boy waited to inquire for his sister, the greater his reluctance became to speak, under the growing certainty that he would be answered with an 'At last,' and a reproof; but he began to listen with some anxiety to the fragments he caught of Mr. Maclaine's conversation with a gentleman who walked part of the way home; something of 'poor Mr. Braithwayte' hardly getting through the Second Lesson—it must be very trying, &c. What had that Second Lesson been about? He could not by any means remember; and somehow the reading and learning lessons out of the Bible and Prayer Book was so much the fashion of the family, and seemed so much expected of him, that he did not choose to give in to it, but rather remained in his ignorance until he was at church again, and could privately look out the chapter. Then he found that it was one of the miracles of healing the blind.

And this discovery filled him with an awe and misgiving he had never felt before. What had been said to him the first night and morning had all seemed to him mere 'rowing,' and he had not attended to it, with a feeling that they were all making the worst of it on purpose to blame him; but the two days of hearing nothing and of absence of rebuke had really produced a sense of anxiety and an awakening of self-reproach such as he had never admitted in his whole lifetime. That either Lady Euphemia or one of her elder daughters was always with Clara, added to his alarm; and his imagination ranged between the thoughts of Clara's being blind, or actually dying, till he would have given the world to have felt able to ask someone. Bride had, on her return, told her father something about balls—balls burning—but whether eyeballs or the missing ball, Freddy could not discover without coming near, or asking a question, and of such a demonstration he became more and more incapable; so that he went to bed in a mood of vague alarm and foreboding, the effect of which was that he woke in a fright, thinking that Clara was pelting him with balls of blue fire; then slept again, to dream of her pursuing him with black caverns, and insisting that he should tell her where he had hidden her eyeballs; and last of all, he was ever searching in vain for the blue ball with a white rim, which was ever burying itself in a gulf of white flame.

One thing was plain to him, when he finally woke

in the morning, unrefreshed and weary, sure that he had been thinking of something dreadful all night, and moreover, that that something was no dream. He could and would not endure this state of things any longer; he must make his peace at home, and know how Clara was.

His first idea was thus carried out. He asked Nial if he could walk as far as the castle. Of course Nial could; he had often been further with his brothers out fishing. Well then, Freddy suggested, suppose they two were to set out at once this morning, and re-visit the ruins; 'for,' said Freddy, 'I think I could find that ball you know of, and I believe it would be a sort of satisfaction to my sister.'

But Nial objected to being absent from breakfast.

Freddy had just found twopence in his pocket, and looked forward to buns instead of porridge. Could not Nial do the same, or had he no money? Yes, Nial had tenpence-halfpenny of his own, but it was locked up in Bride's desk, and it was such a stupid thing to spend one's money on eating. Fred's anxiety absolutely went the length of promising his companion half the proceeds of his own twopence; but Nial returned for answer a suggestion that it would be much better to wait, so as to get Rory to go with them, inasmuch as there was a report of a bull by the way.

Hearing of the bull, Fred's courage cooled, and he had a mind for the time to back out of the expedition; but the dim intelligence which he gathered up respecting his sister so much alarmed

him, that more and more yearnings to get home filled his mind, and going home seemed impossible till he could bring the peace-offering of the ball. Then, perhaps, they would believe him, and let him stay where he might hear of his sister, in the house for which the little exile was absolutely feeling home-sick.

Alas! however, rain set in, and Roderick would not hear of a four miles walk in such weather. Very blank did Fred feel; and though the dining-room was abandoned to the weather-bound children, and a splendid game of blind-man's-buff there took place, followed up by a still more brilliant and original barricade, he only forgot his anxieties for a time.

Fenella found him crying at the bottom of the stairs; and to all her inquiries whether he was hurt, or if anyone had been unkind to him, she obtained at first no answer, and only after much kind coaxing did she induce him to sob out that 'he could not go after the ball—he wanted to bring home the ball—Papa would never let him go home till he had found the ball—and he *did* want to be at home—he could not bear it any longer—he did want to know whether Clara was so very ill—whether she would be b—b—b— blind, and if it was all that nasty lime! If they would only let him stay at home, he would be so very good—he would not make any noise. He was so very miserable—Papa was so angry.'

'If you were to go and tell him you are so sorry—' began Fenella.

'Oh, I can't go till I have got the ball.'

'Why not? Do you think they won't believe you are sorry without it?'

Fred nodded his head.

'Then I think you are quite wrong, Freddy. I am sure your papa will be quite glad, and ready to forgive you, if he only once sees you are sorry.'

'I can't,' was all the answer she received.

'Could you if I walked down with you?'

Fred gazed at her as if to ask whether she meant what she said, and finally made a glum sort of nod.

She had watched him all along when he little knew it. She had pitied him from the first, thinking his obduracy partly caused by the force of blame that had so suddenly fallen on him, before he thoroughly understood the cause; and she well knew how the slightest token of real penitence would be received at home. The thought was with her all along, while she persuaded him of that true coming to the Father, when the penitent's cry is,

> 'Nothing in my hand I bring,
> Simply to Thy Cross I cling.'

The poor little fellow's lurking wish to recommend himself by the recovery of the ball, and yet the necessity of his throwing himself unreservedly on his father's mercy, seemed to her an absolute unfolding of the spirit of the words she had so often sung.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FIVE CUSHIONS AND SIX NOTES.

On the very day on which they had always appointed their return, Dr. and Mrs. Henderson drove down from the station, and entered their own house.

Letters and parcels awaited them as usual, but there was nothing at which they both looked with so much curiosity as at five rolls neatly packed in paper, and six notes placed by their side on the table, and all directed to Dr. Henderson.

'Ah! only five, of course. My poor Clara,' sighed Mrs. Henderson.

'Which shall I open first?' asked the Doctor.

'Take them in their regular order, as they lie.'

'You open each parcel, and judge of the work; and I will read its note, when you have done so.'

'Let me see. This is pretty good work! Yes, pretty fair; but a different hand has finished it from that which began. Ah, Miss West must have grown tired of hers; and do you see this line in the grounding where the colour did not match? Just as I expected.'

The Doctor gave a fragment of a smile, and without a comment read—

My dear Dr. Henderson,

Poor Clara ought to be writing with this work. It is really and truly hers. I only finished it because she was so very kind as to wish me to do it. It grieves me so much to think how I put myself forward, now I find how much worse I work than she or anyone else—and it is sadly hurried, because we had to match the blue. I know now how conceited I was in offering. Please forgive the bad work if I have spoilt it—and believe me,

Yours very truly,

ALICE JANETTA COXE.

'Alice Coxe! To think of her writing such a modest little note! What can have made such a change?'

'Conscientiousness falling short of its own aspirations,' said the Doctor. 'I always have had great hopes of that little person.'

'So poor Clara's is not the failure! Well then, it will be Miss West. Whose have we here? Oh, this is capital, well-finished work. It must be little steady quiet Mary Rose.'

Dear Sir,

I have the honour of sending you my poor work, such as it is. I have been very grateful for the interest and occupation, and should be most thankful for more employment—even of the commonest plain work for the poor, if Mrs. Henderson would trust me with it. With my sincere thanks,

Yours respectfully,

CAMILLA WEST.

'Wonders will never cease! Who was it that wrote us word that Camilla's head was quite turned by those Bellendens? I gave up all hopes of her when I heard of it. Now—this is a very odd-looking piece. I don't think the work is bad, but it must be nailed out, the canvas is so much pulled. Some shock must have befallen it in the middle; and there has been a great picking out. Is it Joanna Harding?'

'Right, sagacious lady. Now hear—'

My dear Doctor Henderson,

I do not think I ought to send in my cushion without telling you all about it, for I do not think it is worthy—I mean that I am worthy of its being accepted. It is just like the seed on the rock—at least, it was not persecution, but the want of it. At first I was very eager about it, and teazed Mamma and Papa, and everyone, till they could hardly bear it; and all the boys made a plot against us all, to stop the work, only because I was so intolerably tiresome. Then I was proud and pleased, and worked all the more, and thought it was goodness; but it was not, only self-conceit and opposition. For do you know, I was working over a mistake, that I did not choose to pick out; and when Mamma found it out, and said I must pick it out, I was cross, and let the work alone ever so long, going off after another headlong fancy, and thinking you would not come home so soon—only just because I hated picking out. Oh, I am so sorry. At last we heard you were coming home in three days, and I knew I should be disgraced for ever. I went to my basket, and oh! that dear Mamma, with whom I had been so impatient, had gone and picked out every wrong stitch of

mine with her own dear dear hands. I never was so grieved and ashamed, and I have been working every moment. She has been so very good as to leave me plenty of time, and let me get up early; and now she is packing up the work for me—finished only one hour before your train comes in. So I am the lag of all—I who meant to be the first; and my work is so sadly done that you will never endure it. I hope my life won't be like this; but it does frighten me. Only forgive

Your faithful and sorrowful

JOANNA B. HARDING.

'Poor little thing!' smiled the Doctor. 'It may be a life's lesson, after all. I am glad she did not fail. Well, what of the next?'

'Very well worked. Either Mary or a Maclaine. The other of them must have failed—I thought they would; and you know we heard that there was a great deal of gaiety with the Bellendens.'

Dear Sir,

I send my cushion herewith, thanking you most warmly for the privilege of being allowed to assist, and for the pleasant thoughts that such work brings with it. My mother has been kind enough to give me plenty of opportunity, and Bride's excellent arrangement of our days made it quite easy to me; so that it ought to be better than it is. Such as it is, however, accept it,

with the best thanks of

Yours gratefully,

F. G. MACLAINE.

'Oh! then it is Miss Maclaine who has failed.

I always told you that you thought too highly of that girl. The worldliness of Lady Euphemia must shew when it comes to the point; and two things cannot be done at once! But what a beauty this last is! Every stitch square and firm, the wrong side almost as nice as the right. Little Mary can never have done this, I am sure.'

'So am I,' said the Doctor, reading—

My dear Sir,

I send my cushion, and at the same time, I feel that I owe you the confession that, but for Fenella's steady good example, it would probably have been neglected till too late; and even as it is, I fear it has been much hurried; and though I hope the actual work has not been spoilt by my haste, yet I feel that it has not been done with the single-hearted perseverance with which such a task should have been carried through. I only finished it this morning, and thus am the last of your workers. Pray excuse,

Yours ever gratefully,

BRIDGET H. MACLAINE.

'Then the defaulter is really poor little Mary! How can it be? Has she been ill? Is it her writing, or her mother's?'

'Her own.'

Dearest Dr. Henderson,

I am much concerned to have been unable to complete my undertaking. I am sure it has not been for want of diligence or desire, but the work was long and elaborate, and in our position we have so many calls,

and our time is all we can give to charities; and to them, as dearest Mamma says, our chief attention is due. Of late, we have been solely absorbed in attendance on dear suffering Clara and her distressed family; and I have thus been prevented from finishing my work. Perhaps I may finish it if the church is not ready till November.

Your loving and dutiful parishioner,

MARY ROSE.

'It certainly *is* a remarkable fact,' said Dr. Henderson, 'that those who have done the work seem so much less contented with themselves than the one who has not. However, I shall make my rounds and see them all to-morrow.'

'And I shall go and see my poor little Clara at once,' said Mrs. Henderson, putting the pieces of embroidery aside, and hastening towards the door; but on her way, she met Mr. Braithwayte himself coming in, and paused to wring his hand, and ask his tidings of his daughter.

'Better—nearly well, indeed, in health—but we still keep her in the dark. Her eyes will need the utmost care for a long time to come; but that they are saved at all, is owing—under a Higher Power—to the kind friends who have been with her unremittingly.'

'Mrs. Rose and her daughter,' said the Doctor, with a certain dry intonation that neither his curate nor his wife had ever quite understood.

'Mrs. Rose!' exclaimed Mr. Braithwayte. 'What can have made you imagine it, Sir?'

'Her daughter's word,' returned the Doctor. 'She gives her attendance on Clara as her reason for not finishing the cushion.'

Mr. Braithwayte held up his hands. 'I give you my word, Sir, that those two set themselves down in the drawing-room, and never attempted a useful thing; crept up to Clara's room now and then, and worried her to tears or fever; but almost always, from morning to night, there they were doing nothing, wherever they could be most in the way. Lady Euphemia did keep them away from the poor child; but as to getting them out of the house, that was past all powers, till Emily came with Susan. They do Clara any good, indeed!'

'Then did the Maclaines really go on with their care?'

'I tell you, Sir, I cannot speak of what we owe to that family. Till Emily and Susan came, which was not till the fever was subsiding, either Lady Euphemia or one of the girls was always in the house; and with such good sense—such firmness—such cheerfulness—that I do verily believe that my poor Clara was saved from an infinity of agitation of the very kind that would have been worst for her. Even now, they are constantly in and out, helping to make a variety for her in her dark room. I believe that nothing can be better for her and Susan than the intimacy they have begun. To look to a woman like that for advice, is what I could most have wished for them. So wise as she has been about Freddy, too.'

'Ah, poor little boy, what have you done about him?'

'I have made up my mind to send him to school with Johnny. He wants a new beginning. Poor little fellow! Susan had been weak with him—indulgent—and I had not heeded it enough; and when this happened, we were all very hard upon him, and thought him unfeeling. I was quite in despair about him; only Lady Euphemia always said that children's hearts did not know how to shew themselves. She took him home—and what they did to him I cannot make out—nothing, as far as I can hear; but Fenella brought him back to me a different child; contrite is the only word for it—so anxious to give no trouble—so eager to do anything for Clara, so sensible of having done wrong. They keep him still at the Crescent, but he is down with us a good part of the day; and, as long as Emily is with us, there is no fear of the old system beginning again.'

Thus discoursing, Mr. Braithwayte crossed, with the Rector and his wife, the street that lay between the two houses—and, explaining that his two elder daughters were out-of-doors, ushered them up-stairs to the sitting-room—kept cool by open door and window, but with the window closely shuttered to exclude the light. Nevertheless, two merry girlish voices proceeded from the apartment, and the tones of one were in the Scottish accent, that Fenella's native refinement always rendered so sweet and delicate.

She retreated as soon as the first greetings had

passed, but the Doctor followed her out to the stairs, and thanked her for her note. 'I will not thank you for your work,' he said; 'I think you know better—'

'Yes,' said Fenella, 'it is I that ought to thank you, for giving me the opportunity. It has been such a pleasure.'

'And even all the time you have spent here did not hinder your completing it?'

'Oh no—for Bride had taken care to be so much beforehand, that mine was almost finished. Will it do, Dr. Henderson? I mean, is it well worked enough?'

'Indeed it is, my dear. I am no judge of such things, but my wife was greatly pleased with both; and I do believe that you and your sister may have the satisfaction of feeling that you have made a little free-will offering, in a right spirit, and at some slight cost.'

'Bride did,' said Fenella. 'She gave up the music and singing that she did like very much, and she had so much more trouble than I—for she made a mistake, when she was sitting up working by candle-light, and had not got over it when she began nursing Clara. It was real sacrifice and trouble to her! And she will be so glad ours have turned out well.'

After parting with happy Fenella, the loyal-hearted, Dr. Henderson returned to the room, where his wife had been most lovingly greeting Clara, and hearing how fast she was improving;

and how, after the first, it had really been quite a pleasure to be thus laid up in the dark—everybody was so kind to her; and Papa had been so much with her; and Emily had come home; and as to the Maclaines, they had been goodness itself. Her friends would not have dared to say anything about the cushions, if she had not herself begun asking, in a cheerful manner, whether they had been looked at, and hoping that Alice Coxe's work had been good, and the lamb's-wool well matched. 'Poor Freddy!' she said; 'he got Johnny to go with him to find the ball, where he had thrown it, but of course it was not usable; and it was his own proposal to pay for another out of his own money—so Susan is keeping back threepence a week till it is all paid for from his allowance.'

'Susan must have felt it much,' said Mrs. Henderson, who had sometimes exchanged observations with Clara upon Susan's system of indulgence.

'I am afraid she did,' said Clara; 'but I believe she had a great talk with Bride, about when it is right for a sister to complain of a child, and when it only does harm; and she has a good deal made up her mind about it now.'

'Do you know what advice Bride gave?' said Dr. Henderson.

'Always to complain when one has said one will, but very seldom to make the threat,' said Clara. 'I think that was the chief thing. And, if one *did* let oneself be *persuaded* into relaxation or mercy, never to let oneself be bullied.'

'Yes, Bride is a sensible person,' said the Doctor thoughtfully; and Clara added, 'After all, Sir, I have been much wishing to tell you that I quite deserved to fail in this way. I had made sure that I should be certain to succeed—whoever did not. And now I look at my own feelings, compared with Fenella's or Joan's, I see that I took it in a business-like, task fashion; not as a privilege, like them.'

'I understand, my dear,' as Clara's voice quivered; 'it is the great temptation of those who are in any way concerned with the service of the Sanctuary—from the Levites downwards. But I cannot have you talk of it, if it makes you tearful,' he added kindly.

'I thought I should not be so foolish,' said Clara. 'I have thought it over so much. But I must only just say, that I deserved this, too, for being so unjust to Alice Coxe. I thought her only vain and forward; but I know, now, that she had much more of the right kind of reason for wishing to do this than ever I had, and she has been so thoroughly kind.'

Again Clara verged near the perilous tears, and the cushion talk was put a stop to.

The Doctor made his calls the next day, as he had said. Joan Harding's letter was so like her whole self, that his conversation with her and her mother need not be dwelt upon. Both felt that it had been a manifestation to her own eyes, both of her headlong eagerness and of her lack of perseverance; and while she felt humbled at having

so nearly failed, her mother and the Doctor could not but hope that the trial had not been in vain, and that it would lead to a deepening of the soil in which the good seed had ever been prone to spring, and almost as quickly to wither away.

Camilla's was a less comfortable mother. She could not bear to hear her daughter making apologies to the clergyman for not having done better. In her opinion, Dr. Henderson ought to have thanked Miss West with all his heart, for having condescended to do any work at all for him; and she regarded the having a fixed time as a grievance.

'My daughter has so many engagements and avocations, you see, Dr. Henderson, and so many accomplishments to keep up, that her time is not her own. As it was for you, she made a point of giving up everything to it; but I do assure you it was so inconvenient, that I could not have it happen again.'

'Oh!' faltered Camilla; 'please, Mamma—I am so very glad to do it. It is the greatest pleasure I have.'

'Now, Camilla my dear, Dr. Henderson must see that there are many things fitter for a young lady in your position—'

'A time for all things,' said the Doctor, smiling.

'And indeed,' said the timid Camilla, in fitful gasps, 'if Mamma only knew what a help to me it is—how refreshing it is to me to have something

real to do— Please, when there is anything I can do—'

With Mrs. West looking on, poor Camilla had little chance of expressing her feelings, even if she had half understood her real heart.

The person who threw most light on the whole was, of all people in the world, Lady Euphemia, whom Dr. Henderson found with a croquet party on her lawn; and walking up and down, his talk with her was absolutely a *tête-à-tête*.

'To tell you the truth,' said the lady, 'I did not half like your cushion business at first. I thought the girls had enough to do, and that it gave them notions of their own usefulness; and—you know I don't go along with your ways of dressing up churches, and all that. But they are good girls; and to cross them would have harmed them more than to let them have their way—not having time to argue out everything, like Mrs. Harding with her one girl. And I fairly own, Dr. Henderson, that I think we are under great obligations to that work. I thought my Bride there was a wiselike girl, that could be trusted anywhere, or with anyone; but there came one of those times of gaiety that will turn the soberest head; and an idle lad, that, to the best of my belief, was for daffing—as we say in Scotland—with any girl that would attend to him. What with their music, their croquet, their pic-nics, and Mrs. West's being greatly taken with it, I will not say but that we had more than enough of it, and the girls' hea

were being turned. Only you see this work came in as a thermometer. They had it on their conscience; and there was the proof if they grew neglectful. I do assure you, it brought mine back to her bearings without one word on my part; and from that moment I had no anxiety. Yes—true, I had not much from the first. Bride is one fit for full trust; but the lad was plausible, and had a tone and way with him, and I did fear she might have a sore heart at the end of it, as I fear the poor little West girl has.'

'I saw something was amiss with poor little Camilla.'

'Why, you see, the lad (I saw his game, though he never guessed it) was making up to the heiress on one side, while, I suppose, Bride's talk and music and all attracted him on the other. The girls themselves never found it out, and had no jealousies; but a looker-on could see, and wonder how to interfere without putting nonsense in a lassie's head such as might otherwise never have taken shape.' (Very Scottish had Lady Euphemia's tones waxed in her confidential mood.) 'But when I found my girl sitting up till midnight to repair her neglected work, and giving up her pic-nic to do it thoroughly—why, then I knew that her conscience and her cushion had done their work, and that I might hold my tongue. Then came poor Clara's accident; and the party was broken up: the lad was off yachting; and if the little West girl was silly enough to droop for the like

of him, she will have worked some of it into her cushion, and be all the wiser when the next access comes.'

'Do you advise me to supply her with needle-work for the parish? She begs it, and her mother discourages it.'

'Her mother is too full of her airs to deserve to be attended to, as long as she is not led to flat disobedience. Give her the work, by all means. They have taught her with all their might to be a fine lady; but it is not in her; and the poor child will never be happy without a duty to do. If her mother would let you fill her mind with some wholesome, practical, homely work—charitable would be best—there would be some chance for her.'

'Perhaps it may be provided,' added the Doctor, with a smile; 'if you keep the good lady up in the belief that such things are done by the *élite*.'

'I am sure,' said Lady Euphemia, in her hearty homely way, 'I always wish my lassies to make themselves useful, be they where they may: and among so many, I hope more may be done in time than now; for what with their father's health, and the school-room full of little ones, and the living away from our own place, I have been forced to lay more on the two eldest than is natural at their age; but they are good girls, and I hope it will not be the worse for them in the end.'

'I am sure it will not,' said Dr. Henderson, earnestly.

'And let me tell you farther,' continued t

lady; 'I think it has been a very good thing for them all that we had to come here just at this time in their lives. How sore a trial it was to break up from home, you can well guess; nothing else than my husband's improved health could have made one bear it; but I am more reconciled to it now than ever I thought I could be. There were wills and wishes that came up when the girls came to the age for making their own characters; and we could hardly have dealt with them so satisfactorily without such an outer influence as yours has been—gaining the will by the way—of what, for want of a better word, I must call the imagination.'

'"The aërial gleam that fancy lends
To solemn thoughts in youth,"'

said Dr. Henderson, much gratified: 'not the teaching in this place, but that of the Church.'

'I do not enter into all you say of that, or all you have taught the girls,' returned Lady Euphemia: 'it is not as I was bred up. All I meant to say was, that much that I was averse to at first, and thought tended to frippery and folly and irreverence, I see now has been to these young things a real expression of devotion, and training in it.'

'Because it tends to the glory of God,' said Dr. Henderson.

'Well—that's a question that perhaps persons bred so differently as you and I can never agree on,' said Lady Euphemia. 'You think splendour

and ornament to His glory. I like simplicity best, and feel it most in accordance with what I have always believed; but I see by my children, that what seems grave and simple to me, is bare, cold, and repelling to them; and I am free to confess that what they have met with here has been good for them—very good. It has done what I could not do with them; and I shall be glad of whatever advice you may give them, or the younger ones.'

Dr. Henderson had seldom been more gratified by any conversation with one of his flock, than by this candid testimony coming from so sensible a woman, and one so likely to be prejudiced against his views. He took it to himself as a tonic to prepare him for what was to come next—his call at the Turtle-nest.

Mrs. Henderson had written to desire to have Mary's piece of work returned, to be finished at once. It had been sent accordingly, and had been found to be not half done. At first sight it was plain that the canvas was tumbled and limp, the white lilies soiled, and the false commencement at the further end still not picked out. Closer examination had disclosed a tract of wrongly crossed stitches, then a leaf awry—and worse than all, that a thread of the canvas had been cut; and though there had been an endeavour to work over it, the result had been a mere botch. It was impossible to do anything but take a fresh piece and work it from the beginning; and luckily Mrs. Henderson had been prepared for such a catastrophe,

and had the materials ready to put into the hands of her sister, who was to arrive that very day.

Dr. Henderson knew perfectly well what he should hear, about dear Mary's earnest wish and many interruptions. Long before even Mr. Rose's death, he had found out that talking to Mrs. Rose did her more harm than good, and gave to himself the sensation of a bath of soap-suds. And to Mary, he was sure that to listen to such a conversation did infinite mischief. He was therefore much relieved to see her small person gliding on alone before him in the street; and by making a few longer steps, he soon overtook her, and addressed her. 'Good morning, Mary; I am glad to have overtaken you; I was on my way to you.'

'Oh,' said Mary in her timid manner, 'thank you. Will you not come in? Dear Mamma will be so glad to see you.'

'I think not. It is you whom I wanted to see. I wanted to thank you for your exertions in behalf of the church.'

'Oh, Dr. Henderson,' began Mary, a little uncomfortably, 'I am so sorry—'

'There is no cause for sorrow if you were better employed,' said Dr. Henderson.

'Why, you see, dear Clara's accident was so all-absorbing, all engrossing,' said Mary, exactly in her mother's tone.

'Ah, true! But I never quite understood what you did for Clara.'

'Oh, then it is very ungrateful—I do say that!'

exclaimed Mary. 'Why, dear Mamma and I were hardly ever out of the house till Emily and Susan came.'

'I see. And you were very much occupied with the care of her?'

'Why—I don't know,' said Mary, who had some truth in her; 'the Maclaines did so put themselves forward. But then, we *might* have been.'

'Then I am to understand that your constant attendance upon Clara is the reason that you were unable to finish the cushion?'

'No—not exactly—quite,' hesitated Mary; 'not if it is put in that strong way; but we were naturally anxious to be at hand; and one could not think of carpet-work when the dear girl's state was so precarious.'

Her mother's tone again.

'Mary,' said Dr. Henderson gravely, 'you must not imagine that there is any sense of personal vexation at your being the only one who has not finished the work.'

'Am I the only one?' interrupted Mary, in a genuine voice of surprise and mortification.

'The only one. Clara's was finished by Alice Coxe.'

'Well!' exclaimed Mary, 'I never thought Miss West, or Miss Harding, or Miss Maclaine, would have done theirs! I am sure someone helped them!'

'No one, Mary. But may I ask how that affected your cushion?'

Mary hesitated a moment, but answered, 'I thought hardly anyone else would finish so soon, and then it would not signify.'

'What would not signify to what?'

'Dr. Henderson,' she said, fretted out of her bashfulness, and almost ready to say 'How tiresome!' but recollecting herself, 'I thought, if no one else had finished, you would not care.'

'The point is not whether I should care, but whether, having undertaken to make an offering for the Sanctuary, you have done your utmost.'

'I am sure I have done nothing else! I have not been to concerts and parties and croquet and pic-nics.'

'*Having the alternative*, you gave them up on that account. Is it so, Mary?'

'Well—no; but then, we have never sought the world and its snares.'

'It appears, however, that these same snares did not hinder the completion of other cushions.'

'Some people do work faster than others.'

It was the first approach to an admission of any sort of inferiority.

'And why, Mary? Did you ever try to find out?'

'Mamma says nothing is more dissipating and distracting than to live in a hurry.'

'True; but there is a medium. Mary, I want you just to answer yourself candidly this one question: Why was not your work finished? Was it really owing to your attendance on Clara? Was

it absolute incapacity? Or—stay, here is the short cut to the Rectory. Come in, and look at the work.

Mary had much rather not, but was forced to submit.

The Doctor put her into the study, and himself fetched the six pieces, and spread them out. Mary looked, and spoke not a word; but great tears slowly gathered in her eyes; and at last she said, 'It is very odd! I did think I should have been the one to do it best.'

'And what did you found that expectation on?'

'I don't know. The humblest always is—'

'The humblest! That is true! But how about the humility that claims to be the humblest?' said the Doctor, more than half amused, though sad and pitying.

'What!' exclaimed Mary, in unfeigned amazement, 'do not you think me humble?'

'The question is not what *I* think, Mary.'

'But I am humble!' exclaimed Mary.

'See here, Mary. If this was a story such as you have often read—the widow's daughter in the little house, who never goes to parties, would be superior to all the grand young ladies. The tortoise would beat the hare. It is very gratifying; and tortoises sometimes do. But then, they are tortoises that go on: of the two, I had rather have a hare asleep than a tortoise asleep—or a tortoise too sure of the race to bestir himself—eh?'

'O Dr. Henderson, are not you hard on me?'

'My dear Mary, I care greatly for you; for I valued and loved your father; and I think you much need the discipline you lost with him. My dear, do not talk about it to anyone; but before you go to bed to-night, look at the Parable of the Talents, and observe that it was he with the one talent, who hid it in the earth, and threw the blame away from himself upon his lord's austerity. Joan Harding writes to me how nearly she failed; and asks if her life will be like the history of her cushion. Mary, it will be well for your life, if you take warning in silence by the history of yours.'

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